Many visitors to the famous caves at Ajanta and Ellora miss the opportunity to see the contemporaneous cluster of caves nestled in the hills two miles west of the city of Aurangabad. While these shrines are lesser known, they are aesthetically very significant, and they afford penetrating insights concerning the development of Buddhism in India during the 5th and 6th centuries A.D.

The flow and development of the life of form, reflecting the transitional period when Tantric influences were being conjoined with Mahayana Buddhism is examined. A comprehensive and beautiful collection of photographs integrates the multiple elements of the many aspected caves. The iconography sheds authoritative light on the history of Buddhism.

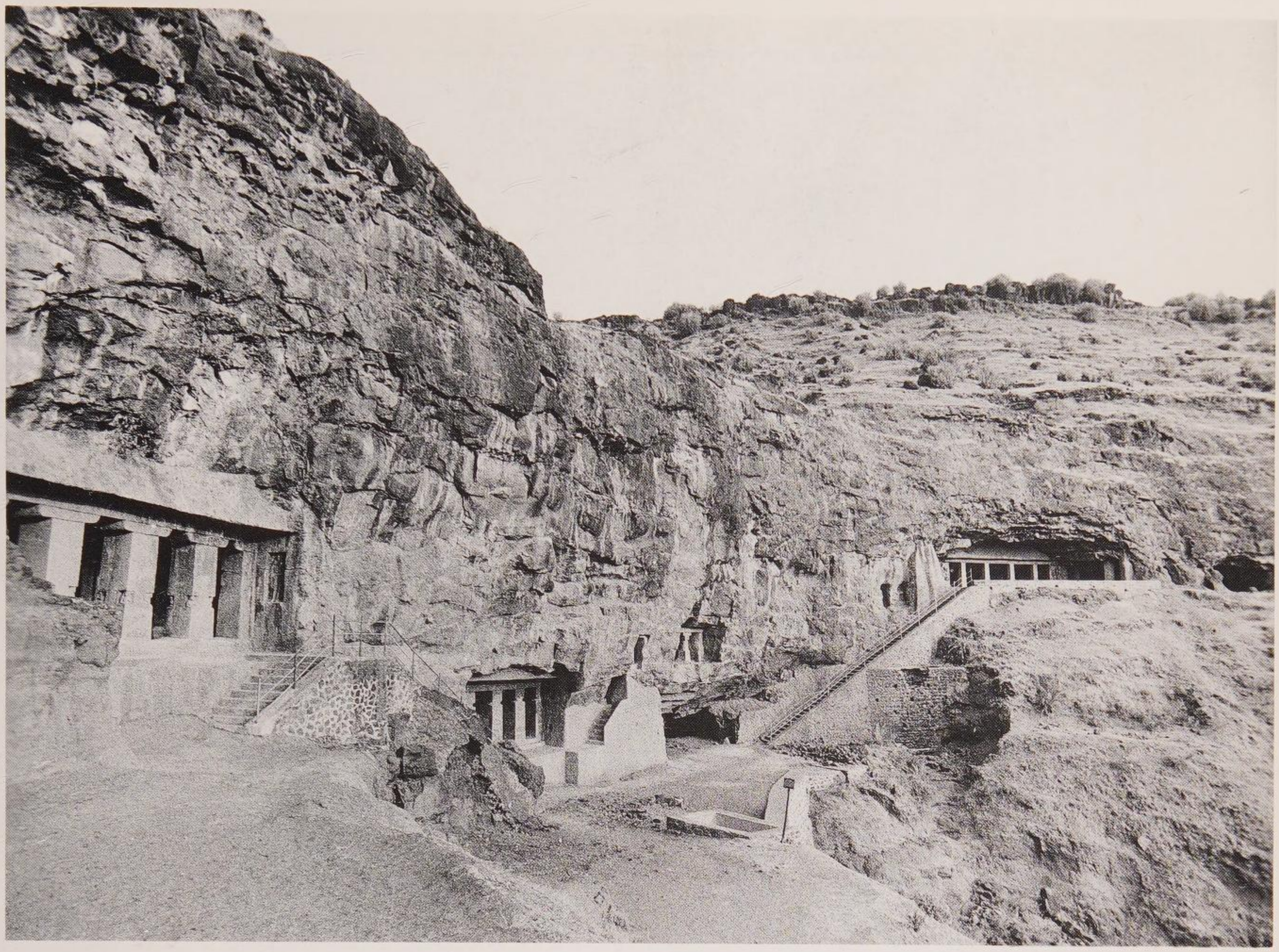
In the initial section, the text is a background introduction to Buddhism with some remarks about the contemporary social background. The second section is descriptive of style in the sculpture, composition, architecture, environment, ritual prescriptions and the interrelationships of all these to the devotee and the serious visitor.

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

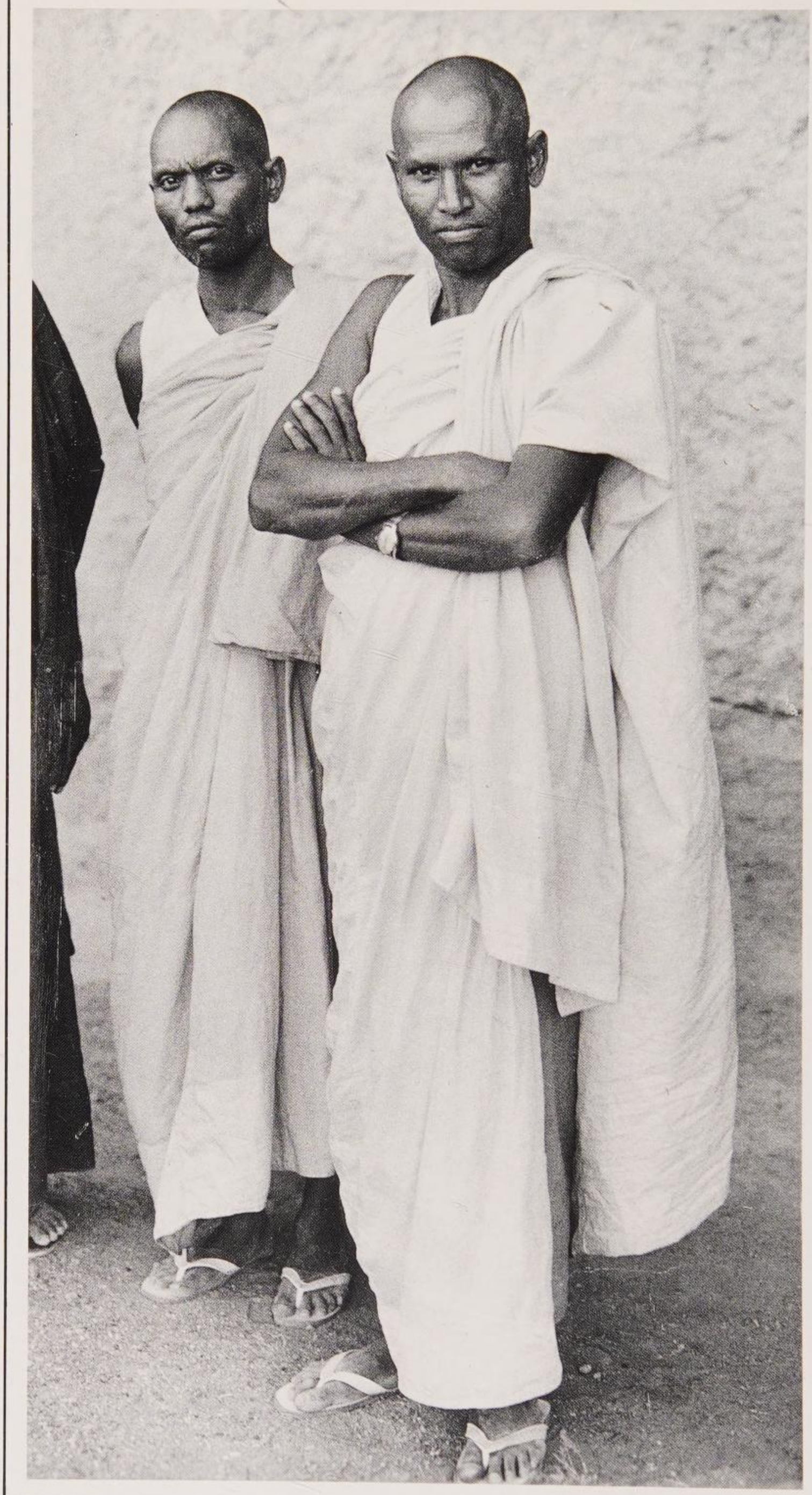
The ascent to the southern group of caves : Caves 1 to 5

Previous Page
A view of the plains from Cave 5

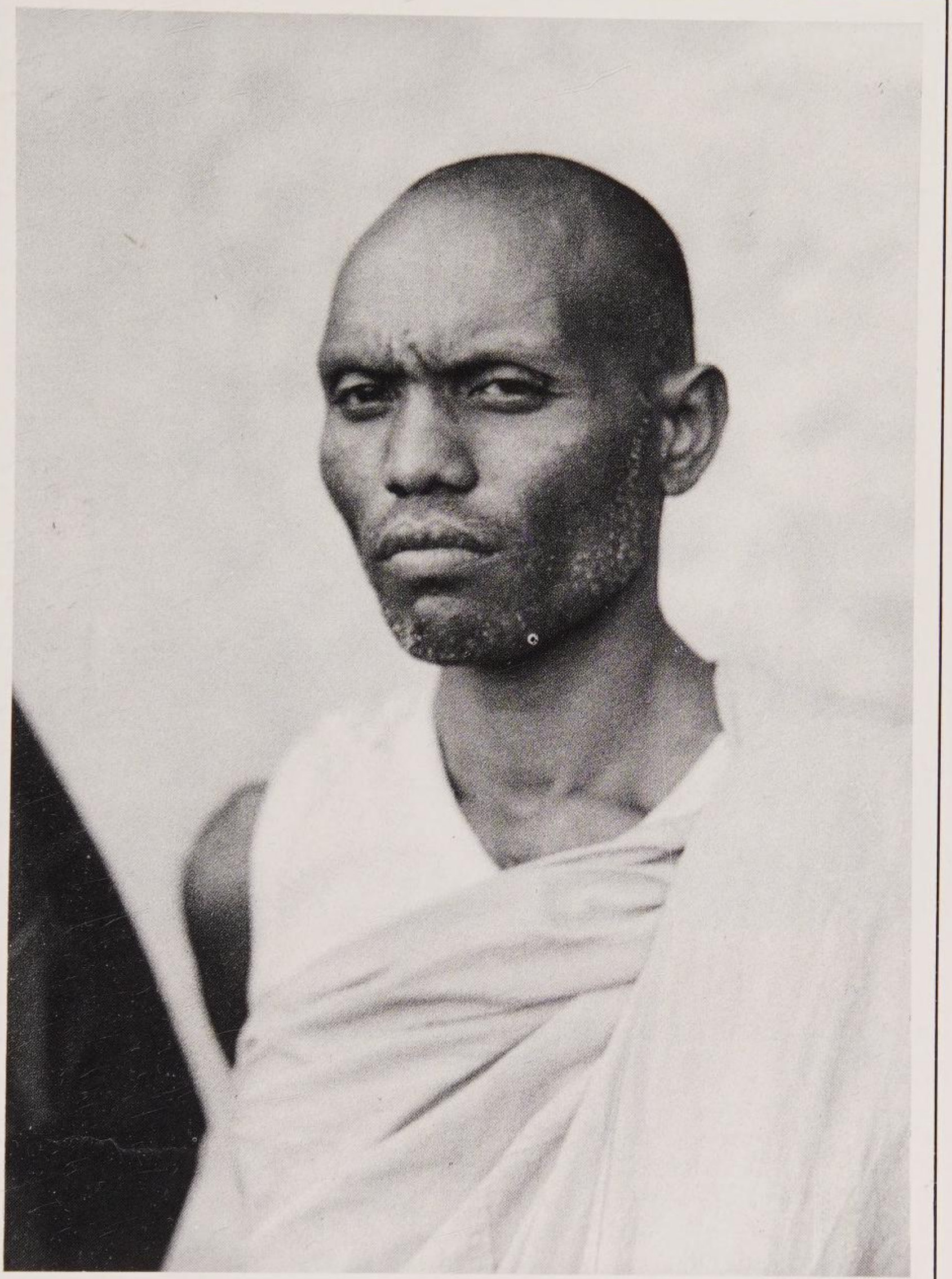
Endpapers :
FRONT : *The southern group of caves.* BACK : *The northern group of caves.*



The northern group of caves



Visiting Buddhist monks



A Buddhist monk of Maharashtra

A view of the plains from Cave 5, showing the Bibi-ka-Makbara in the distance and the road to the Marathwada University

A view of the plains from the north with Bibi-ka-Makbara in the distance

Buddhist monks on the stairway between Caves 8 and 9

THE CAVES AT AURANGABAD

THE CAVES

AT AURANGABAD

Early Buddhist Tantric Art in India

Text and Photographs by
Carmel Berkson

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The preparation of this volume required numerous trips to the site. The Archaeological Survey of India has been more than generous in allowing me permission to photograph the Aurangabad Caves as well as Elephanta and many other sites in India. I am extremely grateful for this continued cooperation. At the same time I also wish to acknowledge the encouragement and welcome I always receive from the South Western Circle of the Survey at Aurangabad.

Many people in Aurangabad, including rickshaw and tonga drivers, the Archaeological Survey guards and others who have become my friends have made me feel at home in this wonderful city. Whenever it became necessary the staff of the Marathwada University Library came to my aid and cooperated fully.

Arthur Duff made the groundplans; but more than this, he entered into the spirit of the adventure. Jane Cary helped with the final editing. Vishvanath Sarian, the printer at Mitter Bedi Studios in Bombay, manages to bring out the best in negatives, even those taken in the utter darkness of the shrine. Pravina Mehta's assistants at Architects Associates, Bombay, drew the *Dancing Tara* diagrams.

In the design, it was a happy circumstance which enabled me to work with Dolly Sahiar, whose deep experience with Indian art and with the Aurangabad Caves resulted in the coherent aesthetic which links the book with the environment of the caves.

I have learned a great deal from Dr. Bhattacharyya. His identifications will give authenticity and authority to the volume. I am grateful that he has permitted use of these sometimes new interpretations here unaccompanied by textual supporting evidence which would have not been appropriate in the context of a book planned for a general readership. Scholars will find ample references in his numerous other published and unpublished works.

But my gratitude is essentially for Mulk Raj Anand, who first focused world attention on the Aurangabad Caves in 1963 in MARG : *Aurangabad Sculpture.* He often shares his deep insights concerning all aspects of Indian life with me, and during the past seven years he has generously encouraged my work.

Bombay, 1984

Carmel Berkson

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Preface

It was during my last visit in October 1983, when the young architect Arthur Duff accompanied me for the purpose of preparing the groundplans that together we experienced a startling and exhilirating event which has created a lasting impression on us both.

I would like to share this with our readers. We had spent many days in the caves. On his knees taking the measurements of the shrine of Cave 7, with his head between the legs of the magnificent seated Buddha, Arthur chanced to hear the echo of our voices. He thought to experiment and began a low chanting of the sacred syllable OM. He struggled to achieve the proper tone, and after a few attempts, his voice was heard to resonate deeply throughout the chamber. As he continued, the shrine became full with powerful, resounding reverberations. The effect was wondrous and profound, so intense were the vibrations : he kept on chanting. Within some minutes we had both been plunged into a near-hypnotic state caused by being thus enveloped in deep resonances and mass of stone, in darkness. We very soon became aware that we were now involved in an ambient situation which was suggestive of deeper meanings, which hinted at unattainable realms of experience referring to that which lies beneath the personality, not actually cognizable. I was now more able to empathize with the Tibetan worshipers I had observed chanting in the Buddhist shrines at Ellora. The meaning of sound in the Indian context was being revealed. Arthur even felt the enveloping manifest sound as a physical experience.

Sound in space, being of the first order of manifestation out of the Absolute, filled with the power of God, is a highly charged element. By continual chanting of *mantras,* the worshiper is enabled to enter a trance-like state, all the more easily to shed his temporal associations. The space within the shrine thus becomes space existing outside of time. The physical void of the shrine is metaphor for the true meaning of *sunyata,* the Buddhist concept of the void, which is full.

It would thus appear that in planning the relationships of walls and the figure of the Buddha in the shrine and of the narrow spaces of the circumambulatory pathway, those who excavated and planned the construction were consciously preparing an environment suited to the specific rituals of chanting of *mantras* which had come into popular use in Tantric Buddhism. The architecture of the caves may be understood as having been executed with attention to refined accoustical effects designed to aid the worshiper to shatter the temporal plane in his quest for a transformation of his nature. Sound in the space in the void in the shrine helps to eliminate the boundaries of individuation; the ego merges with the Buddha, making quiescence achievable.

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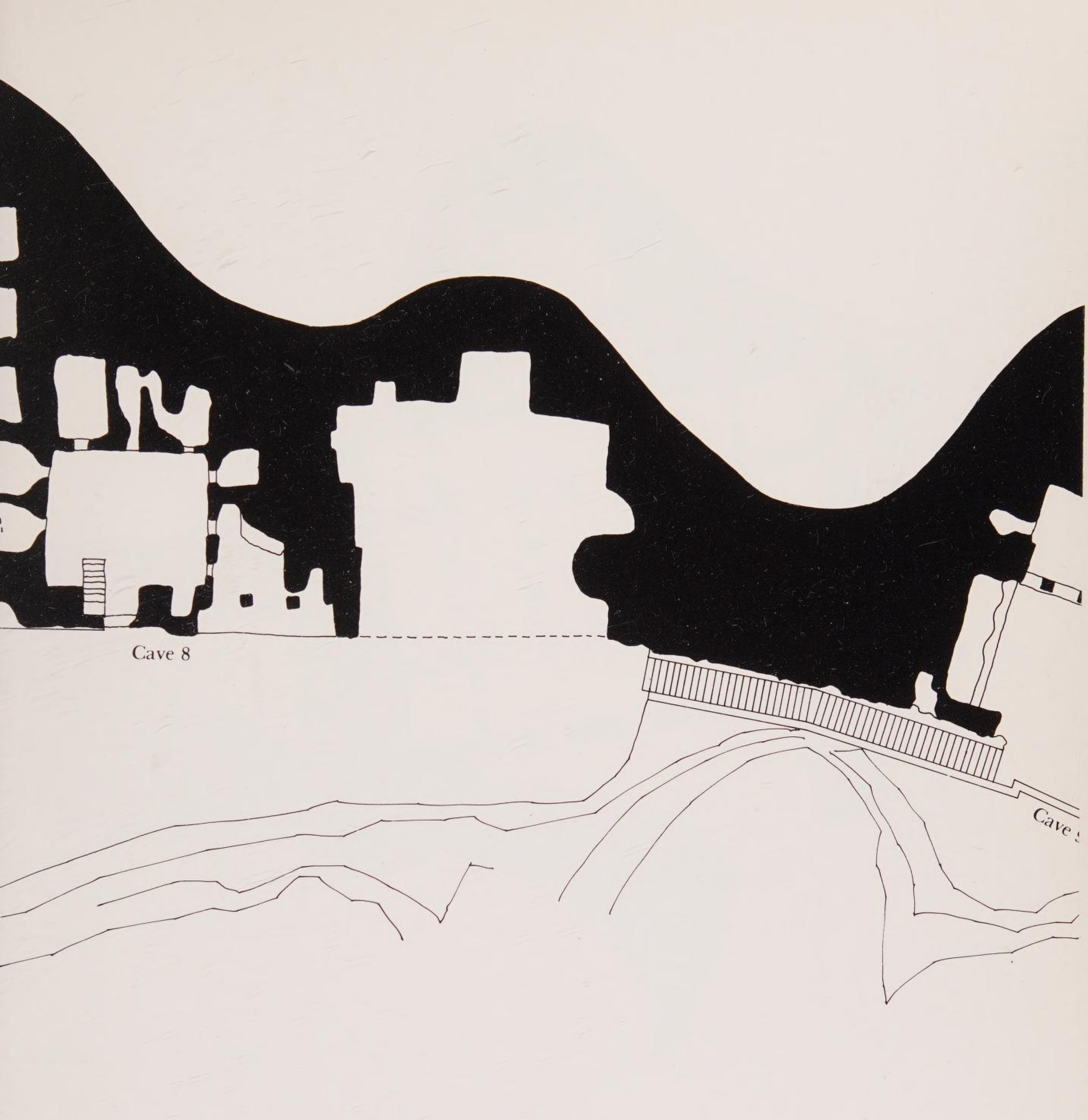
Cave 8
Cave

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Carmel Berkson

A Dream of Amrapali

"Oh! Lord! Oh! Lord! teach me in dreams how to carry out the work in the morning," Vishwabandhu mumbled in his half sleep at the end of every night.

The Lord had not come where the *stapathi* slept by the opening of the cave in the nights. In one early dawn, however, a beggar in orange robe appeared, a bowl in his hand, standing before a woman holding her child. And then a herd of sheep was passing like blurs of grey-white across the hill. A rustle in the bush sounded like hunters creeping in the rough tall grasses, where roared wild boars. Under the pupils of his eyes Vishwabandhu saw some dark figures seated on their haunches, eager eyed. Some stray dogs barked. The *stapathi* felt the perspiration on his neck trickling across his chest. He wriggled to breathe, as though to fill his lungs with enough air, to sniff away the fear of the boar killing one of those men in his nightmare. Blood curdling was the fear of death.

He turned on his side. He felt the wet of his dribbling mouth on the rough cushion of his bundle of worldly goods. "Bhagwan!" he mumbled. Then he mumbled the Buddhist prayer. *"Om Mani Padmai."* And he shut his eyes tight to sleep, as the half light of the night still enveloped the early morning.

Stirrings of dread rippled in his throat. He wriggled again and prayed: *"Om Mani Padmai."* The stale odour of the nether-world was in his nostrils.

Under the uneasy pupils, demons pressed onto his eyes. The figure of Yama, mace in his right hand, his horned head shaking in anger, appeared, the fearful eyes glaring at the *rakshasas* for not striking the damned hard enough. Yama seemed furious that some of the evil-doers were swimming away in the pool of murk, which spread in the area of the opaque dream.

Sorrow possessed Vishwabandhu's heart. His limbs quaked. He felt the pressure on his eyes. He shook his head to release himself from the bad dream-of pain. Beneath his breath he felt tremors of longing to be in the arms of the young girl to whom he was betrothed, but who had died a slow death from the germs in her chest. The regret of losing the pleasure of her coy smiles swept over him. It was the only tenderness he had known in life.

He felt in his bones that the enlightened one was right when he had cried out: *'Dukha ! Dukha !'* to the multitude. He vaguely understood how after every pleasure there was pain. Time was not on the side of mortals, as one's breath might cease at any moment.

He felt the earth mixing with the dribble in his mouth. The smell of chagrin was in his sweat at the apperception of decay. He opened his eyes and recited: *"Om Mani Padmai."* And he swept the bare brown earth with bleary eyes, as it was now just lighting up towards the glow of gold on the east.

Disturbed by the convulsions of his dreams, feeling the disquiet of unappeased sleep, he closed his eyes again. He tried to empty his mind, mumbling: "Oh Lord, teach me, ..." And then he asked, in words without words; is there nothing in life worth living for ? In the next moment of the trickling of sand through the hour glass, he dozed off again into a deeper layer of half sleep. Under the shadows, now there was silence. In the vague middle path, there were intimations, below the grit in his eyes, of doomsday. Then waves of nausea arose as after a drunken bout. And his will asserted the calm of acceptance of everything in the nerves of his disturbed body.

Sleep came then, like a swan over the waters. The swan met another swan. And they pecked at each other's necks. And, in their playful peckings, the dream revealed the Lord: strangely enough, in a garden by a lake. Then a woman swayed her arms, gestured with her fingers, stamped her feet on the earth, shook the bells on her ankles, so that the leaves of the plants swayed and buds opened, and thunder tore the sky. And the Master, with his disciples sitting by his side, and tears in his eyes. Vishwabandu turned his head on the side. The shock of seeing the Buddha smiling evasively, as though in guilt at being happy, stirred the dreamer. He remembered his own pleasure on seeing the swinging waists of the girls in the village as they carried the water pots home from the well. Maybe the great Master, Master of Masters, had felt a moment of ecstasy to see a Devadasi dance. To be sure, had he not stayed, in his old age, at the house of Amrapali, the dancer ?

The *stapathi* brooded on that moment in the dreams of every night. He was in reverie about the dancer for days. And he turned inwards to feel the thrill of the dance, albeit with a strain of guilt from the remembrance of the Buddha's injunction against dance.

One day as he directed his young apprentices to break enough of the rock to make the small opening bigger, the fellow carver, Ananda, asked him :

"Brother, the first of six caves on which we worked together has been scooped out, after the duration of endless full moons. And now the light can enter even at night and make the dark glow. This seventh cave mouth is small and may take many more moonshines to prepare for carving reliefs. But have you thought of the figures you will scoop out?"

"We have created several *bodhisattvas,*" Vishwabandhu said, "but we have not thought of Taras."

"They demand obeisance from pious people," said Ananda, "from those who ask for light to be freed from pain."

"I have had a dream about the Enlightened One in which a woman appears, to please the Lord with the swaying of her body—and the Master seemed rapt."

"A woman !" exclaimed Ananda.

"To be sure, I had a vision of a woman dancer. And before her sat the Lord Buddha. And as she moved her limbs, to the tune of the song sung by the musicians, Gautama waved his head and beat time on his knee."

Ananda was silent. Then he looked up at the master *stapathi* and saw him intent, staring out in the distance. He dared to ask : "Our Lord Buddha sat before a dancer?"

"To be sure," Vishwabandhu said.

Ananda waited for more words.

"I myself have felt rhythmic stirrings in my body as a child. I did not walk, but, capered. As a youth I liked the hips of young girls, as they danced in circles, clapping their hands to the beat of their drum. Emperor Ashoka had banquets. Dancers swayed before him in movements like Yavana girl devotees in the temples of their gods. The Abbot of our monastery asked me last year whether I have seen the paintings of nymphs in the caves at Ajanta. And I feel that in the *natya* one can feel ecstasy."

"Master!" exclaimed Ananda.

"The first impression on the eye of a figure carries the wave to the nerves," said Vishwabandhu. "Then the nerves transmit the pleasure of movement. The heart stirs the brain where only a few lotuses are yet opened up. To awaken the other lotuses, the dancer repeats each movement. Until one sees beyond space - time."

Ananda looked at the master, open mouthed.

Vishwabandhu answered his gaze : "If the body sways to music, the dancer's

feet stamp the earth, the soul opens up to the vision of the earth in movement. And then one may feel the rhythm of the spheres. The third eye may open and burn through the cloud of unknowing, to the vision -- of creation itself!''

Ananda looked at the *stapathi* in amazement and then exclaimed :

''This is Brahmavidya. The Hindu *shastras* say that Brahma Prajapati created the world as Lila, in a playful mood, when he took his consort Lakshmi in his embrace. All creation to the Brahmins is from desire. But the Enlightened one shunned desire.''

Vishwabandhu was silent for a while. Then he said :

''How could the Enlightened One witness the love play in the dance of Amrapali night after night? Delight is not mere pleasure of the senses. It is a vision of rhythm beyond pleasure and pain. It gives one insight into the flux of movement, of which we are part. When the Buddha asked us to be good, he meant us to go through the *karma* of understanding the beauty beyond words, which is in the balance of the elements. In that moment the hell on earth is transcended. We emerge from the night into the dream of the inspired moment, when one has insight into energy itself, into decay and dissolution and rebirth. And then we know decay, dissolution and death as part of the cycle of *karma* itself.''

Ananda bent his eyes before Vishwabandhu. He had not understood the conundrums of his master. He asked :

''Then do you mean that the path of right words, right thoughts, right action and conduct means good thought, good words and good actions and good conduct ?''

''The good is beauty itself !'' said Vishwabandhu. ''Many drunken poets achieve beautiful poems.''

''To be sure,'' said Vishwabandhu, ''the poet is often a genius.''

''He is a devil, angel and spirit. He opens up heaven above hell with his prophecies.''

''But Master,'' asked Ananda, ''what is Nirvana ? Is it heaven ? I was told it is nothingness.''

"The Enlightened One did not define it. Perhaps he meant release. And this freedom was to be attained by good deeds, good words and good conduct. But salvation may be through the imagination. And imagination is prophecy. And prophecy may renew the energies for all experience. Until we lapse. And experiment is the flow of energies, beyond the caves of our bodies and minds, to witness the play of the elements in dance."

Ananda was still apprehensive about this promise of fulfilment. He asked :

"Why did the Brahmins set fire to Harsha's pavilion when the Emperor became a Buddhist?"

"Because," said Vishwabandhu, "the Brahmins had made faith into ritual. They could not understand the Emperor embracing the faith of love and pity and understanding."

Ananda cried out : "But what about the abbots of our monastery? What will they say?"

"I have no doubt," said Vishwabandhu "that they have learnt from Harsha to forgive the enemies. And they have seized upon the essence beyond words, of *Nirvana,* the infinite and the holy."

"Did Harsha understand our Master's message?"

"In Harsha's words, which I have retold, it seems that the body is not separate from the soul. And imagination cleanses both with prayer. One can see beyond looking. Beyond the doors of perception is apperception. This can open up in the caverns of dark of the night to the light, which comes from the sun, that fills us with energies."

"And how can one have the vision?" asked Ananda.

"In the *Surangama Sutra,* written by a ***bodhisattva*** about a thousand years ago, there are the words : 'My Lord taught my brother and myself to concentrate our attention on the tip of the nose. And as I did this I began to notice after three weeks that my mind, in and out breathing, seemed like smoke coming out of chimney. At the same time my body and mind became internally bright. And I could see the whole world becoming clear and transparent like a crystal ball... Then my mind became enlightened and I attained the state of non-intoxication."

"And then ?," asked Ananda.

"We become Yogis," said Vishwabandhu. "It would take us all our life to carve the vision of the ecstasy of the dance of Amrapali, which may release the body-soul."

- Mulk Raj Anand

"Whoever meditates on the Bhagavati in a lonely mountain cave espies her with his own eyes, the Bhagavati herself gives him his very breath, nay more even the Buddhahood, which is the most difficult to attain, remains as it is in the palm of his hand."

The Indian Buddhist Iconography
Binyatos Bhattacharya

Cave 2 : vestibule, north wall :

Mahapratihara, *The Great Miracle at Shravasti in which the Buddha proliferated himself; north wall, vestibule, Cave 2*

The Roots

Forms in art often exhibit a definite tendency to be immutable, to maintain a separate identity through many centuries in the face of and despite the vagaries of changing ideological, religious and political influences. Certain symbols, universal themes, seem to have a life of their own which is little affected by external societal transformations. They drive through the history of art untransformed and unyielding in the face of extrinsic influences. This is very well illustrated in the Buddha panels which are carved on the walls of the circumambulatory path *(pradakshinapatha)* of Cave 2, in which human figures with snake hoods *(nagas)* support the straight pole-like stalk of a lotus. In Indian mythology *nagas* abide in their watery kingdom (*patala loka*) which they rule beneath the earth. The Buddha is seated and is flanked by attendants and flying figures (*vidyadharas*). He is represented as being in this world, above the waters, upon which the lotus floats. The composition is a familiar one at many of the Mahayana sites of the Western Deccan. The theme is a metaphor for the birth of the Buddha who, while remaining partly in the Absolute, is at the same time within the universe. In this way the Mahayana artists coordinated their compositions and themes with those of the living popular religions. The motifs of water, lotus, *naga* and world pillar *(mula-stambha)*—which the stalk represents—are legacies from an archaic past. The first extant example of the goddess Lakshmi seated on a lotus rising from the waters being lustrated by elephants may be observed at Sanci, and it appears twice at Aurangabad; but it must have been a frequent theme in the art of the popular religions, since the Sanci composition shows sophistication in the design. The birth of a deity out of waters is an archetypal symbol in many cultures. In traditional Brahmanical conceptions as well, God manifests himself out of the formless waters, the unconditioned situation prior to existence, before the particular instant of creation.

Seated on the lotus, the Buddha's position represents the marriage of Buddhism with the local cults and with Brahmanical theories. Through the centuries, as Buddhism developed, it sought accommodation with and emulation of the indigenous religions and with the philosophy of the Upanishads. In the centuries which followed the same configuration was also adopted, with some variations, as a Brahmanical theme at Elephanta and Ellora. The Indian mind takes special turns at different periods and in different places while at the same time it manifests a common underlying response.

The people arriving in India in various waves of migrations, merging with the prehistoric autochthonous population, were perpetually in process of formulating religious systems in order to come to terms with the exigencies of existence. Then the Aryan intrusion in the Vedic period and subsequent other foreign influences were grafted on to the earliest strata. By the 6th century A.D.

Cave 7 : The mandapa *wall, surmounting each window : Lakshmi Abisheka : the goddess Lakshmi being lustrated by elephants*

a complex and diverse society had evolved which was still motivated by the identical impulsions. The primal folk cultures of India, depending upon defined relationships with the deities, with roots as ancient as time, have persistently been a life-giving force, even as it is today. Although sometimes repressed or hidden by accretions, this force has never lost its vitality. It is true that foreign and native elite systems have exercised political and religious power, and Brahmanical and Buddhist philosophers and their royal and commercial patronage have dominated the secular and theological spheres. Even so, this primal source of the civilization—its people—perennially provided the actual labour and energy without which the religious monuments could not have been built. In the past, and still today, Indians have remained in close touch with the fundamental tradition of the people, which has a ubiquitous influence on every aspect of the society. It is neither Buddhist, Brahmanical nor Jain, but Indian. No particular overlay, either aristocratic or intellectual, is capable of detaching itself entirely from its base at the folk level, with the permanent, if ever changing, body of myth, ritual and modes of social intercourse.

While studying the Buddhist caves, especially of the Mahayana and Vajrayana-Tantra period, certain assumptions should be kept in mind. At its beginning Buddhism was a purifactory movement arising as a reaction against the already calcified Brahmanical hold over the mind of the people. It also was a reflection of man's concern for his fellow man. While it certainly did satisfy the inclinations of philosopher and ascetic, it nevertheless, in order to ensure survival, had to serve, in the final analysis, only as mistress of a people forever steeped in their own persevering religious modes. At best these people were able to understand and absorb only a Buddhism which would by necessity take into account their own vital mental outlook. This will be made evident as we proceed with the study of the efforts of the Buddhists to graft an iconography and a system of images onto an already living organism of popular imagery.

The mental attitudes of the masses were based, as they still are today, upon the worship of deities who had a crucial role to play in the survival needs—deities and spirits believed to control the forces of nature and to determine the lives of each individual throughout the stages of his life history. All of life had to be ordered in a recognizable system which was transmitted from generation to generation. Most village Indians today are still locked into this frame of mind; their psychic life is involved in a perennial certainty of relationships with a familiar and constant set of local deities. Rituals are conducted in relation to uncarved stones, to trees and to all kinds of natural shapes of a variety of color and material, to cow and bull—as symbols of creation—to water, rivers, amulets, snakes and *gurus* as *avatars*. And yet there is also the simultaneous universal comprehension of a pervading oneness which unifies all existence and underlies all the diversity. For the Indian, since all aspects merge ultimately into one totality, there is little rigidity about which image is used or in which locality the worship of the particular deity or spirit takes place. Although necessity and habit and specific learned responses do limit the world of experience, boundaries separating one cult from another and one religion from another remain fluid, and great tolerance is shown amidst the varieties of modes of worship. It is in this context that Buddhism was able to involve itself with the life of the people, since often its themes and iconographical expressions evolved out of the folk art.

Before the development of Buddhist art there had been a world seething with cult and popular images, few of which have survived, since most were made of perishable materials. Local gods *(yakshas)*, goddesses *(yakshis)*, female fertility figures *(shalabhanjikas)*, flying figures *(gandharvas, kinnaras, apsaras, vidyadharas)*, mythical composite animals *(makaras)*, loving couples *(maithuna)*—as auspicious signs of fertility—serpent princes *(nagas)* and intricate, decorative and abstract designs were now incorporated into the

aristocratic, classical art of early Buddhism. Although they were given a role subordinate to the primary iconic images of the Buddhists, the earlier symbols were at no time discarded or disregarded, in order that the popular mind would be able to make the transition into Buddhism, slowly and unconsciously.

Prevailing conceptions influenced the design. In regard to the juxtaposition within the shrine of Cave 7 of the sensually evocative female forms near the image of the teaching Buddha with all its implications of non-attachment, it is necessary to reject rigid classifications as to what is either sensual or ascetic. This has no validity in the Indian context where nothing exists that does not also admit of its own opposite. In the daily rituals which cater to every sense, there is no concrete delineation of what is sacred and what is material. The round or rebirths *(samsara)* in the Mahayana philosophy may be enjoyed, but without attachment. Beauty in nature as exhibited in the human, animal and vegetative forms should be appreciated, since freedom from existence *(nirvana)* and *samsara* are all part of a common universe. Although visitors to this country are sometimes puzzled by what seem to be contradictory images, for the Indian, opposites are permitted to dwell side by side without arousing tensions.

"Among the market-towns of Dachnabades (south) there are two of special importance : Paethana, distant about twenty days journey south from Barygaza; beyond which, about ten days' journey east, there is another very great city, Tagara. There are brought down to Barygaza from these places by wagons and through great tacts without roads, from Paethana, carnelian in great quantity, and from Tagara much common cloth, all kind of muslins and mallow cloth, and other merchandise brought there locally from the regions along the seacoast. And the whole course to the end of Damirica is seven thousand stadia; but the distance is greater to the Coast Country."

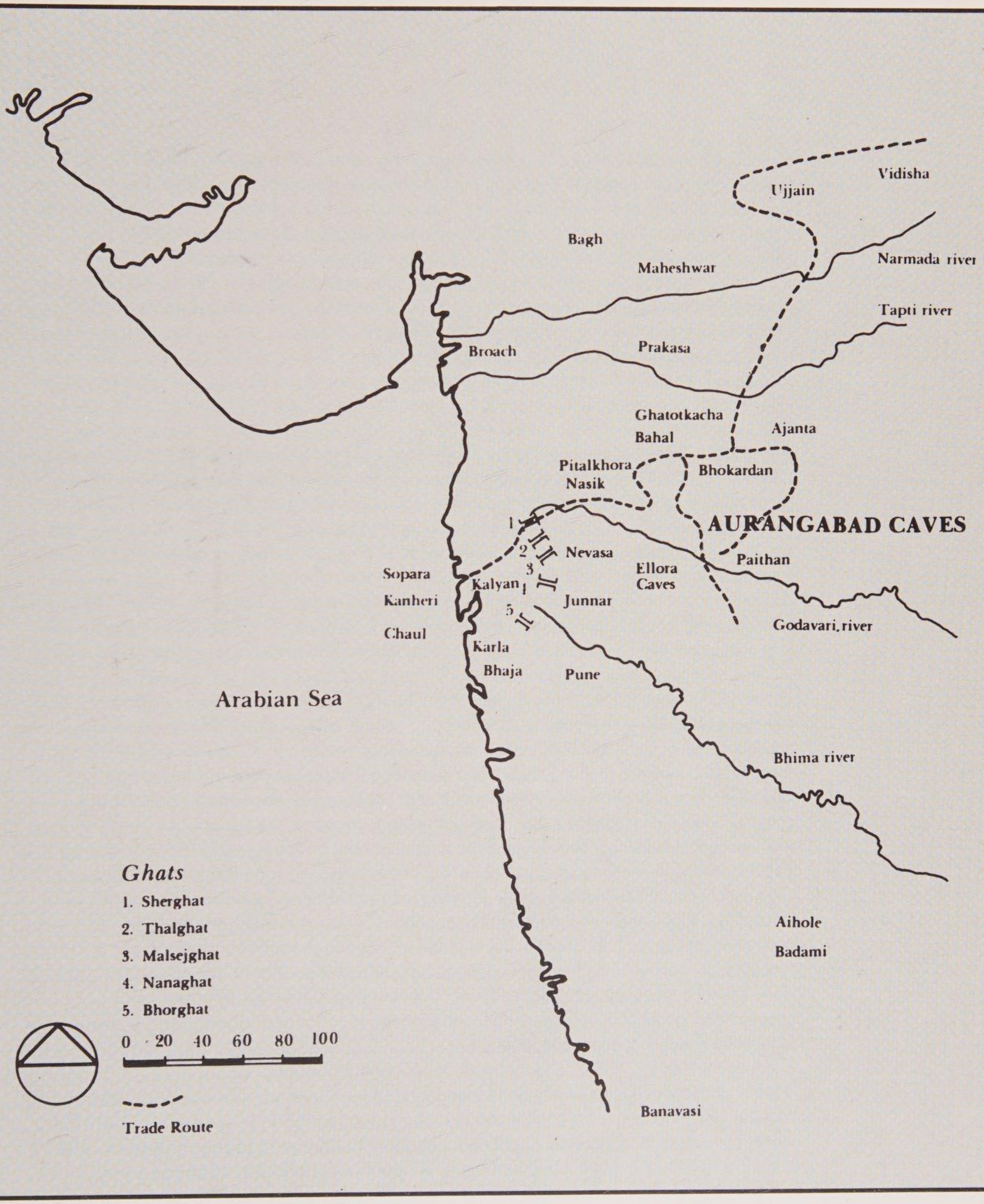
The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea
by an unknown sailor-merchant
1st century A.D.
translated by Wilfred Schoff

The History

Seven hundred feet high, the Aurangabad caves are situated in the Sahyadri range of the Western Ghats in Maharashtra and are carved into the mountain side Deccan trap scarp which is a basaltic lava covering an original granite and gneiss base. The dramatic, long and arduous ascent towards the two groups of caves two miles west of the city of Aurangabad initiates the process of transformation which the devotee undergoes, his spirit focused on the sacred as he turns his back to the world. The mountain is large, enveloping nine excavations which seem almost to disappear and to be absorbed into the cavernous darkness of the earth, swallowed into the shelter of the mountainside, thus aptly symbolizing the peace of *nirvana*. In religious imagery, the mountain, with its isolation, quietude, difficulty of access and height above the world, has always been associated with the deity, and it is most likely that these recent shrines would have replaced much earlier ones dedicated to local deities reaching back into prehistoric times. Nestled in the hillside, the caves were monasteries *(viharas)*. Although the monks were engaged in daily rituals aimed at the attainment of an ultimately transcendental state of *nirvana* in which they would be released from temporal sorrow and anxiety, at the same time Mahayana Buddhism was to lead them in the direction of more worldly pursuits.

The water that rushes down the hills in gushing streams in the monsoons is silent witness to what could have been an organized system of agriculture. At the foot of these falls the Archaeological Survey found stone-cut reservoirs for drinking water. They measure about five feet by ten and are contemporaneous with the caves. Remains of water wells of the Moghul period in the vast plain at the foot of the hill indicate that it was then densely inhabited; it may therefore be assumed that prior to this, for more than a millenium, a lay population had been practicing farming on property that may have belonged to the community of monks who occupied the caves in the 6th century A.D. and for a few centuries thereafter. The history of Buddhism is the history of the symbiotic interaction of monk and layman. An active community life must have enlivened these now very dry and desolate plains. Even today, women from the neighbouring villages run up and down the hills with great alacrity, gathering brush for fire. What must the activity have been prior to the deforestation of modern times ?

Further inferences may be made. The number of cells for living is small, and even if each housed more than one monk, the monastery could not have been built to serve an isolated monkhood, since patronage for such costly monuments would hardly have been available. They must have also served the ritualistic needs of the general population who were living in close proximity to the caves as well as those of the travelling merchants who made this a stop in their journeys.



The map indicates the primary routes linking the Aurangabad Caves to the major trading centres.

No doubt the hills of Aurangabad had been occupied for devotional purposes since time immemorial. The five hundred or so years that span the building of the excavated caves testify to a very long and possibly continuous occupation of the site by Buddhist monks and their lay supporters, even though it was probably in the 5th and early 6th centuries that most of the caves were built. The exception is the apsidal vaulted hall *(chaitya)*, dating from an earlier period. The caves are located only a short distance from the tributory of the Godavari river. One of the great Indian river highways, the Godavari flows west to east from the hills, cutting the continent through its middle; it has always played a crucial role in moving men, trade and ideas to all parts of the country.

Mesolithic hunters and gatherers roamed the Godavari valley in prehistoric times and were later joined by native and immigrant cultivators who built settlements as well, as the excavations at Diamadabad and related sites have recently proven. Inscriptions date back to the 3rd century B.C., and by the 2nd century B.C. individual mendicants, travelling westward, brought with them from its birthplace in Magadha the word of the new religion. Missionaries also came here, as well as to the rest of Asoka's empire, and Buddhism took root, as is evidenced by the multitude—probably eight hundred—of Buddhist cave temples which were excavated in the vicinity in the following centuries.

During the succeeding four hundred years the Satavahana empire depended for its success upon a thriving maritime and interior trade and on a complex agricultural system. Prosperous feudal barons owned private tracts of fertile land which were tenanted by skilled farmers. Irrigation, the iron plough, a multiple surplus of a variety of crops and a plentiful monsoon were the conditions responsible for the high productivity level which encouraged commodity exchange for home and export consumption on a wide scale. Professions were organized into guilds. A listing of some of the trades is useful: there were caravan leaders, ship-builders, iron-mongers, carpenters, stone masons, blacksmiths, jewellers and goldsmiths, workers in tree and flower nurseries, weavers, textile workers, designers, basket-makers, physicians, perfume vendors, shopkeepers, tailors and embroiderers, oil pressers, fishermen, the skilled and unskilled agricultural workers and many others whose interacting production and distribution formed the life current of a brisk town and village economy.

The Aurangabad caves are approximately sixty kilometres from the ancient capital, Pratishthana (Gr : Paethana), the modern Paithan, which, in addition to being a political and commercial centre, was the bustling hub of the active economic life of the empire. Situated on the Godavari river and having six

avenues of land highways, Pratishthana was connected in all directions with the important thriving urban emporiums within India. A major road started at the ancient ports of Barygaza and Sopara and led via Nasik to Bahal, Pitalkhora, Ellora, Aurangabad and Pratishthana on to Ajanta, north to Ujjain, east to Benares and south via the later capital, Ter, to the Tamil country. A complete network of rivers and roads linked the important centres. Caravans of ox-wagons, accompanied by bullocks, horses, mules, elephants and human porters, loaded with goods, travelled through the passes of the Vindhya mountains and the Western Ghats, exchanging products which foreign and Indian trading vessels had carried to the various seaports dotting the western coast on the Arabian Sea. By means of this criss-crossing of routes, Pratishthana and the Aurangabad caves fed and were themselves nourished by cultural and religious ideas which travelled along with the trade. It is within this milieu of intimate interaction of agriculture and commerce with the monasteries that the Aurangabad caves should be studied for the role they played in the society. Although the Satavahana empire declined in the 3rd century A.D. these factors continued to influence Buddhism and the monastic system.

A reciprocal and mutually beneficial working relationship developed among the guilds, the merchants and the monasteries and also with the community in general : land owners, industrialists, individuals and often the ruling powers. By the 6th century A.D. the Mahayana monasteries had accumulated great riches in the form of fluid capital, metals, jewels and land property, even while at the same time they continued to preserve and disseminate the basic tenets of poverty and asceticism relating to the monkhood about which the Buddha had preached. Their wealth often provided much needed capital for the merchants' new enterprises; it paid the costs of producing surplus farm commodities on monastery-owned land; it supplied the monks' material needs, which had by now swelled to support an affluent standard of living, including the use of much oil for lamps, silk for robes, an ample diet, furniture for the *viharas* and travel to and from the universities. In their architectural ventures the monks and their lay patrons hired—in addition to the work force of thousands of unskilled labourers —architects and planners, designers, sculptors and painters. To administer the complex life of the thriving monastic institutions stewards, treasurers, superintendents, kitchen personnel, storekeepers and many more specialized workers were employed. In fact, by this time, these institutions had grown so powerful that they were accorded great esteem, if not, it would seem, without some amount of cynical appraisal of the materialistic orientation.

The guilds were also powerful with accumulated wealth : they maintained private armies; served as banks, paying interest on loans; controlled the hiring

and firing in the professions; and ordered the private life of the members to some extent. Thus they were in a position to contribute large amounts of funds to the monasteries. They endowed meeting halls, cells, tanks, columns, walkways for meditation and parts of complete *viharas* and provided food, clothing and medicine in exchange for acquiring accumulated merit for 'good influencing power' *(karma)* in the future, for participation in ceremonies and for receiving blessings at regulated times in the year. Pilgrimage to holy places was a standard way of religious life, as it had always been in the past, and as it still is today.

The religious needs of the individuals led them to seek attention from the monks at the monasteries. The laity, rich and poor, depending on the monks for ritual, comfort and learning, made ample contributions. For the merchants, blessings were needed for the journey. Cave 3, with a negligible number of cells for living, may well have been the centre for so much coming and going.

There are no inscriptions at the Aurangabad caves which would verify that a particular ruling dynasty was in power at the time of a specific excavation. There may be a difference of perhaps seventy to a hundred years between the excavations of the earliest and latest Mahayana caves, which includes all but Caves 4 and 5. It was the general custom of local as well as intrusive rulers during the period under study, the 5th and 6th centuries, as it had been in the past, to support a variety of religious institutions, even though, in general, the kings or powerful provincial overlords personally favoured the Brahmanical orthodoxy with its focus on Vedic sacrificial rites to solidify their personal power. The major role in financing the monumental building enterprises fell, however, upon the monasteries themselves and on the guilds, the merchants, the landowners and private lay and religious individuals, many of whom were women; in short, all those who could benefit materially or spiritually by their monastic connections. The projects need not necessarily have been closely associated with any particular dynasty. It may be safely assumed that the rulers of the principalities of Rishika, Vidarbha, Asmaka, Trikutaka and Akola in the neighbourhood and Basim branch of the Vakatakas in the 5th century and later the Chalukyas may have participated in endowments to some extent, although there is no sound proof that either of these latter great empires had indeed established a permanent rule in Maharashtra at this time.

Buddhism

Theravada

The deep malaise at the beginning of the 5th century B.C. reflecting the need for a rebirth of religious spirit and a return to an elemental and close connection with the energies of nature and Self created a fertile atmosphere for the advent of the future Buddha. His sense of loathing upon realizing the sorrow in the world arose also in revolt against an inflexible priestly dogma, which had mired the individual in the overly rigorous, already ossified rites. The sacrifice had been reduced to a raw and blatant act of violence. The ritual was no longer harnessed nor regulated, as it had been in the past, by a true psychic interaction of sacrificer with the slain animal to symbolize identification with the deity. The destructive effects upon the minds of the people had already for some centuries resulted in profound societal eruptions.

The birth of the historical Siddhartha Gautama, son of the chief of the republican Sakya tribe, who was later destined to become the Buddha, was merely the climactic event which followed in the wake of a long-term, evolving philosophical orientation. A new ideology was being formulated representing a definite rupture with the accepted orthodoxy of the Brahmanical hierarchy, even while it was accommodated to much of the indigenous mythology and shared meanings inherent in the early Upanishads. For a number of centuries prior to 557 B.C., which is the supposed date of the birth of the Buddha, ferment was in the air as new modes of atheistic and puritanical speculation challenged the Brahmanical priests.

The institution of wandering, homeless mendicancy had probably already been well established by the 7th century B.C., especially in the environs of Rajagraha in Magadha, which had not been totally Brahmanized at this time. Renunciation was advised for those who were involved in a search for the Absolute, either in the third period of life *(ashrama)* when household duties were handed over to the son, or in some cases even earlier. Those individuals who had undergone the ritual of going forth, with begging bowl as symbol, formed a loose community which existed outside the main stream of conventional society. As they wandered they practiced asceticism, and they conducted serious ideological discussions concerning prevailing conceptions which bore the seeds for the Buddhist theology. Thus, Siddhartha's act of renunciation following upon his insights into the nature of the human condition was not unique nor without precedent. He was adopting one of the available choices, even though it was not common among sons of tribal chiefs. The disciples who claimed him as Mahapurusa (superman) also were adhering to an accepted and respected tradition. The concept of Tatagatha, Buddhahood, of a superhuman being, a guide or teacher with miraculous powers, who had

lived through infinite previous births as a compassionate being, a *bodhisattva*, and was predestined to become enlightened and to achieve *nirvana* had also come to be accepted long before the birth of Siddhartha.

Mythology concerning the life of the Buddha centres around four specific events : the miracle of his birth at Lumbini, born of the mother without intervention; his enlightenment after meditating under the *bodhi* tree at Gaya; his identification with the doctrine of the law for the good of the many which he preached at the Deer Park in Sarnath; and his leaving of the world *(parinirvana)* at Kusingara. The events of the life of the Buddha provide a base for ritual reenactment, but the doctrine enunciated by the Buddha known as the *dharma* focused not on ritual but on the ethical principles of non-violence (thus denying the authority of the *Vedas*); on eradication of passion and curb of egoism, which leads to suffering; and on reform, emphasizing charity and compassion and the rejection of the caste system which was already deeply entrenched.

He taught theology with metaphor and analogy in the tongue of the people, Magadhi, a version of Prakrit, for the purpose of speaking to the common man. In order to clarify the insights he had gained under the *bodhi* tree he spoke in parables and told many stories. This attracted masses of the population—many were lower caste Hindus—as well as royal and mercantile support in the centuries after his death.

Shortly after the *parinirvana* his teachings were recorded at the Council of Rajagriha, it is said. The original concepts have been reinterpreted through the ages in different schools, in different languages, but the legendary discourses of the Buddha *(sutras)* which form the marrow of the theology is constant, even while later exegesis reinterprets the basic material.

The Buddha was determined to examine the nature of the human condition, which he defined as suffering or sorrow *(dukha)*, and to confront and transcend it by attacking the causes. Suffering, old age, sickness and death, the loss of that which is desired and the aversion to things has its roots in the fact that all is transitory and destined to be bound to the round of cyclical existence *(samsara)*. There is no beginning, therefore no creator God, and no end. Life is a changing coordinated series of mental and physical states which are always in a state of transformation, and they have no substance. In the early stages of Buddhism the world was considered as real and the Buddha the teacher and guide. He refused to accept despair and formulated a way, a path, by means of which the individual may hope to cross this teeming life stream to the other shore, towards another state of his being, alternately called *nirvana* or

enlightenment, where all human defilements and passions have been extinguished. He remained silent concerning the nature of this new condition, since it defies verbalization. The round of rebirths can be avoided by following the Eightfold Path and other precepts in which desire and passion must be abandoned. With an ethical base, it included prohibition of killing, stealing, committing adultery, lying, abuse deception, greed, anger and false judgement, among other proscriptions, and he counselled compassion. The teachings of the Buddha, the *dharma*, are defined as real, thus a dogma, although the Buddha himself would have objected.

From the past the Buddha had inherited the doctrine of *karma :* all phenomena result from a cause, and action is followed by its effect. With this logic he advocated a path towards alleviation of suffering. Right views and resolve, which is wisdom; right speech, action, living and effort, which is ethics; and right attention and meditation, which is a concentrated mind, is the way to deliverance. These paths were to be pursued according to the efforts of each individual, alone, without aid from any supernatural force, the existence of which the Buddha denied. One seeks salvation for oneself as *arhat*, since it is not possible to work towards the salvation of others.

During the lifetime of the Buddha he was recognized as a teacher of new disciplines, and after his death, mendicant groups with leaders *(acharyas)* continued to spread his doctrine, although differences very soon divided the followers into cults. The movement spread as pilgrims travelled to places where the major events of the Buddha's life had taken place. Tumuli, early burial mounds, soon were transformed into *stupas,* wherein it was supposed that relics of the Buddha were kept. This worship of *stupas* soon became connected with the wisdom of the Buddha in the mind of a growing body of adherents to that which by this time had developed into a distinct religious view.

One of the earliest institutions to be established was the rain retreat, where mendicants, abandoning their wanderings, settled in a particular place for the period of the monsoon rains. They returned each season. It was during this time that intensified activity revolving around congregational prayer and *stupa* worship evolved, as individual wanderers learned to live in communities, and it was also in these early settlements that the tenets of monkhood, the spiritual path *(arhatship)* were formulated. The community *(sangha)*—the instrument to fulfil the *dharma* —now became the basis for the new religion. The monks lived together in a life of discipline and renunciation of domestic involvements. Since the Buddha had purposely not nominated a successor, monks in the isolated localities turned as the final authority only to the *dharma* which soon came to be recorded as the monastic code *(vinaya).*

At first the rain retreats were made of mud, brick or thatch—the *avasa* of the countryside and the *arama* near the towns—but in time, as Buddhism spread, monasticism, taking precedence over mendicancy, evolved as an institution requiring permanent quarters within which the growing body of ritual and community activities could take place. The way of life of the *sangha* implied an order in which monks were united in the common goal, living together, holding property in common, making common decisions without a particular authority, thus carrying out the admonition of the Buddha to be self-reliant. Novices came here and stayed ten years for training, learning, meditation and philosophical study with a teacher. Thus the concept of the harmonious interaction of the three jewels, the *trisharana :* the Buddha, or wisdom; the *dharma*, law and the *sangha*, or pure community was brought into practice.

Because of the close relationship between these settlements and the rich and powerful, pious laity who were primarily responsible for the finances as well as for the benefit of the common people, these monasteries were usually located near villages and towns. Begging by the monks was thus still possible, a part of the system. The monasteries served as both dwellings and places of worship, the early form of which was the recitation of the *pattimokkha*. At first a code for monks, it soon became a bi-monthly confessional meeting which included the performance of penances for sins and transgressions. Later, this developed into the *uposatha* ceremony dedicated to the maintenance of discipline in regard to the *vinaya*. A common, separate and permanent meeting hall evolved to house the ceremony. Here also monk and layman participated in public discussions centering around the legends and teachings of the Buddha and examination of texts relating to the *dharma*. It also served as a general meeting hall for the distribution of food and clothing.

There were four orders : monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. For the layman and laywoman contributions and support for the monks guaranteed accumulated merit for a better life hereafter. This commitment kept the monks in very close interrelationship with the community of supporters and the ever-growing Buddhist oriented population, many of whom were consciously or unconsciously mingling their popular religions of the cult worship of idols, trees, the elements, of fertility, wealth and prosperity and earthly bliss with the sophisticated doctrines of the keen philosophical minds of the *acharyas* and monks.

Among the living quarters of the *sangha* which were evolving at this time—in addition to those constructed of mud, whattle and wood—was the *guha*, a dwelling constructed either of brick or carved in the living rock. The latter is the rock-cut cave built for the monasteries which was to initiate the long

tradition in India. Prior to the period when the Buddha was represented as an iconic image, the caves were simple dwelling places for the monks, and they were usually devoid of sculpture.

Another structure which was to develop in relation to the monks' quarters and to the separate meeting hall was the *chaitya* hall. This was apsidal in form, with serialized columns forming nave and aisles, having a vaulted roof. It was isolated for congregational worship of the *stupa,* symbol of Buddha's presence and, in the mind of the people, an object for propitiation for good in this life. First adopted by lay people and then by the monks, it became a popular object of worship. These settled communities grew to be complex institutions which functioned as collective centres.

Madhyamika—Mahayana

During these early centuries efforts to understand and to systematize viewpoints which were not in harmony resulted in the proliferation of schools and the formation of numerous separate sects. A century of rival speculations as to the meanings of the words of the Buddha ultimately led to discord at the Vaishali or Second Council in the 4th century B.C. One of these sects, the Mahasanghikas, were expelled by the Theravadas, fundamentalist monks who defended orthodoxy. This major schism was an early expression of the Madhyamika proto-Mahayana doctrine which was to be formulated in its metaphysical aspect by the great philosopher Nagarjuna, who probably lived in the 2nd century A.D. It is his genius which originated the idea of the void which is full *(sunyata),* the quintessential concept of all future Buddhism. In his treatise, *Perfection of Wisdom (Prajnaparamita),* all systems which try to apprehend *sunyata* by means of reason are rejected in favour of an intuitive understanding of an unexplainable Reality. In effect, the new viewpoint arose as a reaffirmation, if indeed a reinterpretation, of sayings of the Buddha. In the following centuries at Kanheri, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda and in the hundreds of communal monasteries in the Western Deccan, the movement strengthened and theories were elaborated. With the formulation of the *sunyata* doctrine, Buddhism had taken a new turn which was to be perpetuated during two millenia of discourse. At the time, however, the Madhyamika tenets were branded as heretical, and the protestors, in retaliation for being designated 'sinful monks,' coined the phrase Hinayana, or Lesser Vehicle, using it in a pejorative sense to describe the orthodox Theravadas. The evolving doctrines spread, and the two systems, the Theravada and the Madhyamika, continued side by side, progressing each along a separate path.

The doctrine of Interdependent Origination *(Pratityasamutpada)* which

Nagarjuna defined as spiritual and material interrelatedness, recognizes twelve aggregate conditions (as opposed to separate units) existing in time and space, which are mutually interdependent and are said to have always existed and will always exist, forever causing sorrow in the world. Grasping, desire, sensation, the six senses (which for the Buddhists include also the mind), the material body, consciousness, mental formulations and ignorance all coexist, a series of transitory and impermanent, physical and mental conditions, with no substance of their own.

Suffering, old age, sickness and death, loss of that which is desired and aversion to things have roots in these origins. There is no beginning, no end, nor birth or decay, no God the creator, no being, only becoming, not one nor many, thus nothing is anything in itself. Entities and phenomena have no nature and, since they are unsubstantial, they are illusory and hollow even though they may seem to derive substance from mutual dependence. Relativity and reciprocity is the nature of all things. For example, the fuel and fire are inseparable and are actually only the thought constructions of an inadequate human mind which subjectively conceives of the world as real; this leads to desire and attachment and causes the sorrow that exists in the world. Buddhahood is defined as a timeless Absolute, and the historical Sakyamuni is denied as meaningless in a universe devoid of time.

Thus the Madhyamika is after all not 'the Middle Way,' nor is it any way, for that matter, but it is the negation of any or all paths in search of the Absolute. It was taken for granted by Nagarjuna that, implicit in the teaching of the Buddha and his negation of all categories and denial of substance—although not spelled out by him—is that each particular point of view is self-limiting and self-contradicting, so that no single assertion may be claimed as dogma or doctrine. It had been the followers of the Buddha, anxious to stabilize and coordinate their thinking, using philosophical discourse, syllogism and reasoning, who had framed the idea of *dharma* as the real. The Būddha himself had kept silent.

In seeking some escape from the dilemma resulting from the consequences of the interdependency and the insubstantial, unreal entities which include space, time and the Brahmanical *atman,* the Madhyamikas insisted upon their own dialectic as antidote. It examines the opponent's particular thesis in order to reveal the contradictions inherent in all views. The thesis is turned against itself, reduced to its inherent absurdity and shown to be illusory. There is no need to pose any particular thesis, since all are false, and no antithesis is necessary. It was probably at this time that the legend of the five blind men developed. They touch different parts of the elephant and believe their touch

reveals the essence of the elephant. It is the natural inclination of the human mind to clutch at and to attempt to hold points of view for the sake of security and ego. But in a relentless effort to counteract the proclivity of the mind to be dogmatic, to conceptualize, categorize and divide and to advance speculative theories, the Madhyamikas applied the dialectic to opposite categories, revealing that there was neither being nor non-being, rest nor motion, parts nor whole, neither cause nor effect. In this way the rational apparatus functioned to uncover the truth which lies hidden by its own devices. Truth is inaccessible to reason and the senses. Arrival at the truth of non-dual knowledge is achieved, not by synthesis, merging, amalgamation or fusion, but by negation of each view and by exposing the pretensions of all the philosophers.

This negation of thought was by no means a destructive device; rather it was a means first to apprehend and then to sweep away the cobwebs of illusion, the obstacles fashioned by false thought constructions or forms arising independently in the mind *(vikalpa).* When all reason and fact gained by sense perception is discarded, it is then only that intuition, which has been forever present but repressed or hidden, can be permitted to function, as wisdom, awareness, or perfect knowledge of non-duality *(prajna).* But an attitude of alertness to the insubstantiality of things must be encouraged. Once no longer obscured by reason, thus revealed, supra-rational intuition is permitted free play, and then only will the realization of the ultimate reality be possible. In effect this is a bold affirmation of life, which presupposes a capacity for personality change resulting from rigorous retraining. It gives hope for liberation from suffering, the achievement of freedom, as transformation brings with it a new awareness of the underlying peace of *sunyata.* This truth, *prajnaparamita,* described as empty of the unreal and impermanent phenomenal properties, is at one and the same time *devoid (sunyata)* and full; it exists when and where there is no thing, an underlying condition, transcendent and at the same time, all pervading. Nagarjuna insisted on the identity of the unconditioned and conditioned *(nirvana* and *samsara). Sunyata* is thus pure, so deep as to be unfathomable, unchanging, without attributes. But Buddhism also emphasizes its consubstantiality, in analogy with the hub, rim and spokes of the wheel, which *are* the wheel. It is the sum total of experience and is in no way separated from the phenomena of consciousness, while still being the essence. Asanga, the pupil of Maitreya (whose dates are c. 350 A.D.) affirmed and clarified Nagarjuna's theories of *sunyata,* stressing the fullness and reality of the void.

Nagarjuna seems to have been influenced by Upanishadic emphasis on the fullness of reality. The philosophical abstractions of the Theravadis which had

led to certain nullification of experience were continually being counteracted by the prevailing Brahmanical focus on the condition which enjoys the merging of the individual with the totality of the universe to bring on the state of exhiliration *(ananda)*. The early Mahayanists were also attracted by the idea and desired it for themselves. The interaction between Hinduism and Buddhism, as the two systems developed, cannot be overemphasized, as mutual influences have always played a crucial role in concept, ritual and art in India.

The quest for truth generated great vitality. By the 1st century A.D. canons had displaced the spoken word and a long tradition of *sutras* and exegeses upon them developed during the following centuries which functioned to systematize philosophical views and to reinterpret early doctrines, even while the Madhyamikas were actively engaged in nullifying each point of view.

These doctrines and their implications were enunciated by Nagarjuna and were discussed and refined at the universities, especially at Nalanda, founded in 425 A.D. as a monastic university *(mahavihara)*. It was the central academy for the study of Mahayana and Tantra doctrines. Chinese scholars visited, and they kept records which tell of many great philosophers who provided the inspiration for the tenets of the Madhyamika and the later Vajrayana viewpoints. Other less renowned but equally important universities were functioning at this time.

Life at Aurangabad caves probably reflected the ferment at the universities, where scholars, monks, philosophers, grammarians, commentators, logicians and teachers in the 6th century met for intellectual discourse. The study of linguistics, astronomy, medicine, music, painting, sculpture and arts and crafts was the invigorating mileau out of which the sophisticated formulations of Madhyamika dialectics developed.

The philosophies were for the elite, but the Madhyamikas also saw the need to bring their concepts to the popular level, to create new symbols and to merge them with the cults of local deities, the *vidyadharas*, the *yakshas* and *yakshis* worship of the elements, and especially the *naga* cults. This served the purpose of mediating between the highly abstract formulations of the philosophers and teachers at the universities and of the talented monks on the one hand and the people's needs for substantial and felt experience on the other. The requirement was for symbols which would externalize the emotions to modify fear, to provide the comfort of touching the icon and to enable the worshiper to feel awe, in short, for his participation on a concrete level with all the paraphernalia of the people's religion.

Because it admits of no difference between transcendence and immanence, the concept of *sunyata* implies hypostatization. The Madhyamikas concentrated on the supermundane personality of the Buddha, raising the historical personage of the Theravadis to the role of deity. Even though the enlightened Siddhartha had declared himself to be Buddha, who appeared for those who awaited him, he never claimed Godhood, or to be the creator, nor indeed did he believe in one. While the emphasis in his lifetime was on his personality, the tendency towards elevation of the religious leader had already taken hold, so that as the centuries progressed, the Buddha was raised to Tathagatha status. But such is the genius of the Madhyamikas that Buddhahood now became a possibility for everyone, not limited to a single Buddha. It was open to anyone who first practiced the Buddha's path, became then a *bodhisattva* and finally arrived at the state of Tathagatha. This attracted the masses. The original Buddha was either the presiding and observing deity and protector of the universe, an omniscient person who looks down upon suffering humanity, or as Absolute, he is between reality and the world; on the brink of manifestation; having a will towards substantiality; motivated by compassion to become a personal force in the world when the need arises. Although full with abiding empathy for suffering humanity, he is engrossed in *nirvana* and cannot actually work in the world for the betterment of mankind. Sakyamuni had disappeared into Buddhahood, but present and future Buddhas exist.

There was a felt need for an intervening medium whereby the ordinary worshiper could contact the spiritual force within himself. *Arhatship* was too difficult, and it was limited to the individual monk. The ancient concept of *bodhisattva,* that being who had lived through many lives prior to being born as the *bodhisattva* Siddhartha Gautama Sakyamuni, was now reintroduced, and a group of images which had a long-term potency and meaning for the general population evolved.

In the 2nd century B.C., as defined in the *Bhagavadgita,* the direct and intimate relationship of the worshiper with the incarnated deity *(bhakti)* emerged with force as yet another manifestation of the rebellion against priestly intervention and control of the religious life of the people. The saviour appears to destroy evil, and projected longings find a symbolic receptacle in a tangible representation of the deity who is compassionate and motivated to serve others. This idea is reflected in the *bodhisattva,* a potential future Buddha who chooses to postpone *nirvana* in order to assist suffering humanity to overcome its condition by moving towards a higher state of being. Comprehension of emptiness enables the *bodhisattva* to serve all creatures in benign compassion despite the knowledge that all is illusory. A deep and committed love of mankind, born out of pathos and strengthened by knowledge of the Buddha,

spurs the *bodhisattva* to work for the welfare, happiness, instruction and assistance of others. This reflects the love which the Buddha has, because of their suffering, for all beings. He shows mercy to everyone, especially the lowly, who bathe in his love. His compassion knows no bounds of time, and he is devoted to all creatures. All are equal as the manifestation of the all-compassionate Buddha. *Bodhisattvahood* was open to any monk or layman who took vows to strive towards this state. Nagarjuna had realized the necessity of the Buddha being in the world, and he emphasized devotion to the Buddha and *bodhisattvas* as well as confession of sins in their presence to gain spiritual purification.

In adaptation to changing contemporary, historical and economic events and to the old religions, elaborate ceremony followed in the wake of the new attention paid to the *bodhisattva* idea. Much was borrowed from Brahmanical and cult ritual—the offerings of flowers and oil, the playing of instruments, the use of fire and incense, the swinging of censors, the ringing of bells and the mutterings of *mantras.*

Buddhists learned from the people how to use the senses for worship of the by now iconic Buddha and of the *bodhisattva;* this brought to life a growing complex of means for worship : sculpture, ritual and shrine. This was by no means new but had been merely submerged in deference to the early philosophical orientation of the intellectual Buddha. Indigenous ritual life in India ultimately controls all the religions, and those that strive to survive must and do accommodate. Even the Buddha himself had sanctioned such rites, including, at times, magic.

An enlarged pantheon of iconic representation thus evolved and found its way on to the walls of the previously plain cave temples. The art of Buddhist sculpture was introduced into the caves and, especially at Aurangabad and Ellora, the female was again given all the attention due to her as goddess re-emerged. Images of the *bodhisattva* as saviour and of his female counterpart the *bodhishakti,* to whom one turns for solace, now appeared as decorations on the walls of the cave temples.

The ever growing numbers of idols included the Adi-Buddha who represented the first order of manifestation out of the non-existent *sunyata* and who was higher than the five Dhyani Buddhas and their female counterparts, considered next in the hierarchy. They were parents of the *bodhisattvas* and the *bodhishaktis* and their families. Relationships were systematized with each of the Dhyani Buddhas having a particular physical form, a seed *(bija)* syllable, a mode of worship, a color and a name connected to them. The *bodhisattvas*

came to be known as the primary symbols of the Buddha's enormous compassion *(karuna)*, concretizing the metaphysical idea and enabling the worshiper to form connections with the higher principles represented by these deities.

Bodhisattvas had been carved in Gandhara and Mathura. Later the art of Nasik, Ajanta and related sites saw these images multiplied and made more complex. At Aurangabad the pantheon included females at the early stages of development. Here Tantric principles were expressed in the cave temples for the first time. The final flowering of the art was to appear in Magadha and Bengal during the Pali era.

Tantra—Vajrayana

The meaning of the word *Tantra* is associated with the concept of weaving, to symbolize a well-knit system. As the loom itself and the warp, woof and thread function to create the fabric, so mind, speech and body, involved in ritual expression, reflect the interrelatedness of all things.

Tantric rituals were made available to all, regardless of caste, sex or age, and consequently they had a great appeal, offering release from the orthodoxy of the monks on the one hand and the indignities suffered by the lower Hindu classes on the other.

At the Aurangabad caves Tantric influences are in evidence in the concentration on the female, in the iconography which includes the diamond sceptre or thunderbolt *(vajra)*, in the three phases of Buddhist transformation *(tri-kaya)* and in the architectural design of the caves, some of which were constructed, following the plan of the *mandala*, for circumambulation of the Buddha in the shrine.

Tantric Buddhism in Tibet, Mongolia, Japan and China is based on the practice as it existed in India in the 9th century A.D. and earlier. After this time the Arabs, plundering and ravaging the monasteries and universities, destroyed the libraries and drove the monks and scholars, carrying their hidden texts, to the northeast, away from danger. Most of the texts still in use today—poetry, visual representations, philosophical and ritual compendiums—are Indian in origin and have proven invaluable for the preservation of the Indian Buddhist tradition.

While Tantric ideas had grown naturally out of the Madhyamika and Yogacara schools, sharing theory and certain rituals, always in accommodation with the

autochthonous base and in emulation of Brahmanical modes of worship, variations of approach developed in rebellious reaction against the complacent and sometimes arrogant attitudes of influential monks and scholars. Within the institutions, swollen with pride and swollen with prosperity, often corrupted by dependence upon guilds and royal authorities, there were those who had all too often strayed away from the pure nature of their calling. In an attempt at regeneration of spirit and in order to shake up and to shock the hierarchy, Indian *tantrikas* purposely attempted to flout traditions and to use radical shortcuts to salvation.

Moreover, since the Madhyamikas' conceptions regarding negation of reality and all categories on the path to *sunyata* were extremely difficult, and since they required for their comprehension an elite, leisured class of monks, accommodation to the habits and nature of popular worship was sooner or later bound to be sought. The political powers and indeed the lay supporters themselves naturally realized the wisdom of adapting the Buddhist religious way of life to the indigenous cults and to their Brahmanical overlay. This included, both in Hinduism and Buddhism, intensifying and complicating the pantheon of iconic representations to which numerous specialized divinities were continually being added, since on the popular level it was prayer, confession and propitiation of these gods and goddesses which was ultimately believed to bring the much sought after merit towards salvation.

Developing along parallel lines, Tantric ideas were very much influenced by the formulations of their predecessors. They too were mainly concerned with finding ways to rise above sorrow, which is the nature of life. Perpetual purification by means of meditation, *yoga* and ritual during the many transmigrations helps the devotee to reach higher planes for identification with *sunyata.* Devotee and deity become one, and thereby the Self is worshiped. But since being is denied in Buddhism, ambiguities arise. It was these very ambiguities which the *tantrikas* encouraged for severing connections with the temporal and conventional world, which necessarily keeps the individual mired in the superficialities. Tantric Buddhism, generally called Vajrayana, emphasizes the polarities of existence, but while the Madhyamikas had endeavoured to negate the opposites, thus to realize *sunyata* by means of a refined dialectic process, for the Vajrayanas, it was the positive and negative cosmic charges in interaction, coming together in a union, which resulted in the achievement of the state of non-duality *(advaya),* when wisdom *(prajna)* and compassion *(upaya)* are conjoined. In Tantric Buddhism *prajna* refers to the qualities of being static, of realization and quiescence, i.e. *sunyata,* the void, whereas *upaya* indicates kinetic energy, that which is dynamic. Commingling like water and water, these two polar entities result in the Absolute, the obliteration of duality.

The polarities used as paradigm were the male and the female. The female principle, which had since prehistoric times energized the culture of India, was once again introduced, and now she entered the philosophy and the practice with a force, explosive because it had been lying dormant, quietly repressed by Aryan influences. Every woman, fecund on the one hand and strong and invulnerable on the other, is herself the symbol of *sunyata*—the transcendent with the immanent. As goddess she was now and for the following centuries to dominate the Indian psyche. Female and male polarity became the exclusive concern of Tantric concepts, although the theory itself makes no sexual reference. On the contrary, Mahamudra is conceived as the ground of existence, the matrix and source out of which all emanates and to which all returns, beyond movement, serene and in that sense passive, supportive and full with grace. She is eternal, the divine mother, free from the veil of illusion *(maya),* she is wisdom transcendent. Hinduism differs from Buddhist Tantric thought primarily on this point; for the Hindus the male represents stillness and inactivity, perpetually in wait for the power *(shakti)* to generate life. The Buddhist *tantras* never use the word *shakti. Prajna,* perfect wisdom, representing the female, uniting with the active force *upaya,* representing the male, causes polarization to disappear; a return to the uncreate is thus established. *Sunyata* is achieved as the powers of the universe are utilized, understood and transformed for reunification in the universal. This emerges out of the ecstasy of love, which itself arises at the moment of symbolic or physical coition when the pair is in complete identification with the great bliss, the Mahasukha, or Mahamudra. Descriptions of the female principle, reflecting the Absolute, make it appear to be the male who is absorbed into the female. Naturally, no categorical statements are made. The numerous icons in Buddhist iconography which depict the female in an assertive role indicate that the theory being what it may, icons and rituals were in continual adaptation to their locus in time and place, and often the symbols themselves are contradictory.

The holy man with supranormal powers *(siddha),* often a magician, became the ideal intermediary for the popularization of the Tantric doctrines. Because of his special intuitive inclinations, it was he who could best suggest the proper method of worship for the particular disciple. Although some did indeed employ dubious means, in the main, most of the monks, scholars, philosophers and practitioners in the academies and the *viharas* -- many were ascetics -- were reputable and seriously involved in authentic religious pursuits, spreading the doctrine of Buddhism. Eighty-four *siddhas,* greater and lesser religious teachers, not exclusively Buddhist, taught with song and parable in small inner groups to which one was admitted by initiatory rites with a concentrated master-pupil relationship.

Initiation of the disciples followed more or less the general procedure of Indian rites whereby the *guru,* on auspicious days and thereafter, having determined for himself the specific nature of the character of the aspirant, would invest him with a *mantra,* which is the difficult *sutras,* the wisdom of the Buddha, reduced to simple statements manageable by the average person, a formula with magic force used for religious purposes. Some texts required that a female 'decked in jewels', representing the Mahamudra, should be present at the ceremony.

The goal was cognitive understanding and the contacting of reality, but this was to be effected by the *sadhanas,* or procedures for the purpose of reaching the Mahasukha, the union of the polarities, and it was taught by responsible visionaries. The merging was to be physically or mentally reenacted by the disciple. While the Vajrayanas shared the concept of the identity of the phenomenal and the Absolute with the Madhyamikas, the difference lies in a gradual but growing reliance upon ritual which acutalized the theories by means of experiential participation. In the quest for enlightenment, the Madhyamikas had put less stress on ritual, while for the Vajrayanas, only experience could communicate the truth; intellectual processes were now deemed to be inadequate.

The term *vajra,* translated as diamond sceptre or thunderbolt, is conceived as that state in which there are no longer distinctions between male and female or between any other pair of opposites. Sometimes, since contained in the human body are all the forces in the universe—polarities being in the left and right parts of the body—the disciple enacts the process individually. The union is thus metaphorical. By means of ascetic and spiritual disciplines, *hatha yoga* and meditation, the individual parts of the body, identified with the cosmos and its multifarious components, are utilized for the purpose of integrating all opposites, and thereby the body of the devotee becomes an instrument towards illumination. The hard diamond, the body, adamantine and impenetrable, cuts through everything towards the achievement of the diamond essence, ultimate reality, to bring liberation. Since Buddhism admits no ontology, no concept of Self, this hardened body is in itself only vacuity, though it is full because of the union.

At other times, however, the individual utilizes external devices in aid towards achievement of *sunyata.* In the *Guhyasamaja,* a text generally attributed to the 3rd or 4th century, which seems to be the first systematic Tantric work outlining the general principles, the *Dhyani* Buddhas, representing the aggregate aspects of the individual, are brought to the fore. The *Majursrimulakalpa,* not assigned to a particular century, discusses ritual,

showing symbols and diagrams; it also gives instructions for the painter and sculptor in regard to iconography and introduces Tara. Most of the other abundant literature of the period, based upon ancient models, specifies procedures and ritual *(kriya)* by means of which one may reach enlightenment.

The worship of images was encouraged and this brought in its wake a host of new and diverse iconographical subjects. Precise instructions in the Tantras dictate how and under which conditions the icon, symbolic of the union, should be conceived. Visualization of the icon during meditation transports the disciple onto a higher plane; it is the first step towards incorporating the sacred power represented by the image into oneself for identification with it and in order to awaken the dormant energy-force within the Self. The image is thus only a means towards realization, and it is discarded at the instant that *sunyata* is comprehended.

The *Pancha Tattva* or *Pancha Makara* (a vulgar term) ritual is uniquely Tantric and the most important one. During the ceremony the initiate participates by first consuming certain food and drink, after which, in the fifth procedure, he unites with the female in consummation of the sexual act. All the ingredients start with the letter M : *matsya, mudra, mamsa, madya* and *maithuna.* (fish, parched grain, flesh, wine and sexual intercourse, respectively).

The disciples sit within a prescribed circle *(chakra).* The purpose throughout the ceremony is to reach transcendence. The participant, having partaken of the parched grain and the wine with their drugging effects proceeds to eat the fish and meat and to drink more wine in successive stages, all the while uttering *mantras,* with the express intent of making oblation to the *kundalini* energy, the female principle within the Self, which the Buddhists believe sleeps in the umbilical region. This part of the ceremony having been accomplished, he draws a *mandala* on the sleeping couch, prepares the female devotee by touching the potent parts of her body, thereby transforming her into a goddess, and together they participate in union, enacting the merging of polarities. The pair becomes divine, as they realize the state of *sunyata.* This ritual is practiced by both Hindus and Buddhists, but while the Hindu prescribes the release of semen as a sacrificial offering by the disciple of his seed into the symbolic fire of the female, the Buddhist retains the semen in an effort to stabilize seed, breath and thought in order to reach a state of oneness.

Whether or not the ceremony was ever practiced at the Aurangabad caves is not known, but it is nice to think that Cave 3 would have been the venue, since the *mandapa* easily lends itself to circumscription. Furthermore, often in the ritual the females were seated away from the circle; the adjoining chambers may have

been utilized for this purpose. But this is mere conjecture. The *vajra* penetrating the lotus, however, may be assumed to be a symbol for the fifth procedure. The Tibetan term *bodhicitta notsrfet* (placing the *vajra* in the lotus) is explicit, referring to the concept of the union of polarities, with the male *vajra* - the hard, adamantine diamond sceptre - penetrating the female lotus towards the ultimate achievement of the Mahasukha. Participation in the *Pancha Tattva* ritual enabled the Vajrayanas to understand this highly developed philosophical idea experientially.

Numerous other rituals which had previously been relied upon only infrequently now came into more common usage. These included meditation upon the *mandala,* the chanting of *mantras* and the reading of parts of sacred texts. The circular graphic design *(mandala)* systematized a relationship of deities with the central point of the circle, the representation of *sunyata* or the essence beneath and involved within the manifestations of existence. The surrounding deities drew the disciple towards this centre for his identification with it. The *mantras* were of varying sorts, ranging from portions of the *sutras* committed to memory to a concept reduced to a single seed syllable *(dharini)* which symbolized the message. At this time rituals were used so frequently and repetitiously that they began to replace the *sutras.* To read *Prajnaparamita* and other sacred texts was only one of the various other means which entered the life of the people in aid towards the achievement of enlightenment. Doctrines came to be enacted rather than to be conceived as ideas, including dancing and the worship of idols.

It is therefore a very natural juxtaposition of Dancing Tara and her attendant deities to the iconic representation of the Buddha in the shrine of Cave 7, since *mudra,* or ritual gestures or positions of the body in worship was an accepted mode of paying homage to the Buddha.

In relation to language, *tantrikas* substituted word equivalencies and symbols for known meanings, and, in an effort to destroy the conventional sphere, they mixed the sacred word with the lowest and most vulgar concealed meaning. The devotee was plunged into a vortex of perpetually interacting planes of existence, with the ambiguity of the dark, erotic language and its paradoxical content acting to prevent reversion to reliance upon a particular set of linguistic symbols. The purpose was to keep the *Tantric* disciple himself in a state of paradox. Since in the beginning the Indian *tantrikas* were forced to keep their threatening and antagonistic doctrines secret, their language was also designed to flout and astonish, to confuse and to be understood only in secret by initiates who were deemed ready for accepting these unconventional attitudes. The suggested dating for the Aurangabad caves is the late 5th or early

6th centuries, and signs of Tantric influence appear even in the earliest Mahayana Cave 1. It may therefore be assumed that the secrecy was only a temporary stratagem in use up until the time that acceptance of Tantric principles became more general.

Intentional ambiguities arise, but this is also because of different interpretations and because some teachers, being in general unschooled in the philosophies—although they surely were understood by their own adherents—often used common village vocabulary that does not stand the test of scrutiny. It must be remembered that the disciple studied for ten years, and it was the nuances of the meanings that he sought for clarification of that which will always remain inaccessible to the outsider.

Some preferred the easy way of magic. Fertile soil for the growth of occult practices always seems to have existed in India, where life is often in a precarious condition due to the evils of disease, natural and human enemies and other disasters. The high ideals of the Brahmanical and Buddhist philosophies could offer slight comfort at critical moments of overwhelming pain in the life of the individual who sought immediate alleviation of his misery. For these reasons as well it became inevitable that many would turn for quick solutions and relief from terror to the iconic representations of the Buddha and the *bodhisattavas* with all their implicit promise of salvation.

Style, Structure and Concept

The visitor responds to the grand totality of all the elements within each cave, to the relationship of the caves one to the other and to the surrounding environment of mountain, sky and plain, the flight of birds and changing hues of atmosphere. As the plastic symbol of a universally valid religious conception the cave does not reflect merely the narrative, nor is any single component of the sculpture or of the architecture valid in its own right, nor does it ever stand alone and separate. Effecting a formless continuity, the space of the outdoors and all the sky permeates into the space of the hall *(mandapa)* and shrine. Thus the mere description of each element can only be understood as an effort to familiarize the visitor with parts which make up a larger whole, in order that a conceptual aggregate, responding to the kinesthetic intuition, can be mentally grasped. What at first sight appears to be a static experience, soon is comprehended as a kaleidoscopic interaction of shifting forms which the pervading space envelops. The doctrine of Interdependent Origination describing the interconnectedness of all things, so vital to the Indian view of life but formulated precisely in Mahayana Buddhism, explains this orchestration of form. A valid approach to the caves must be primarily concerned with how these parts function in relation to one another and to the entire cave, which in turn interacts with the surrounding environment.

The constituent parts of the cave are : the flat and unadorned surfaces which form the geometrical substructure functioning as a three-dimensional grid; the unifying space; and finally, the organic volumes of the sculptures which provide mobility within the immutable foundation. Bound each to the other and all to each, a coordinated system at one and the same time activates and stabilizes. To this situation is added the person who enters and moves around within. With each change of position elusive tableaux come into view, each is a new set of relationships of geometery, organic volumes and the surrounding and penetrating space. Moreover, nature provides a moment to moment fluctuation of light and shadow, changing in intensity, as the sun moves through its daily and yearly course. There is no reality in the cave beyond this interaction , even though the photographs, snatching and holding a single view and a single instant in time, give the illusion that there is. And yet it would be difficult to remove any of the elements, since an abiding harmony within all the relationships refers to the artists' intuition concerning an underlying totality. This is best observed in caves 3 and 7 because the masters who created them successfully achieved a consummate unification of all the forms.

Examination of the sculpture should focus primarily on Cave 7 and on the attendant deities in the shrine of Cave 3, which represent superb examples of the classical phase of Indian art, exemplifying the style at its richest and most

profound. The works seem to have been executed by sculptors operating in a common milieu which permitted each a degree of freedom and individuality of expression, even though the finer sculptures at the site do reveal certain common traits.

Except for the figure of the Dancing Tara in the shrine of Cave 7, none of the works show angular transitions or setting the figure along the diagonal. All is contour and convexity, aligned along a vertical axis. The volumes are contained compactly within a flowing, continuous outline which seldom is suspended by jagged disruptions. Although in the case of the female figures the forms are often delectably rotund and luxuriously overflowing with erotic implications, there is very limited three-dimensionality; their frontality is emphasized, and the background is flat. The back of each of the sculptures is only implied, and the wall and the figures are inter-coordinated. Harmonious carvings with gentle undulations of line and mass and with subtle differentiations in the planes are devoid of surface ornamentation. This harmony is a reflection of the Buddhist peace of *nirvana*. In many of the sculptures the front view is the least interesting because the style still adheres to the four planes of a block. All views must be studied also from the sides, and from above and from below as well.

In Cave 7 some of the figures are perfectly modelled. They are full but compact, with energy contained within a stern verticality. In contrast, the headdresses of the vestibule figures in Cave 7 represent a new fascination with sinuous and serpentine effects carved upon a surface most delicately and precisely traversed by a chisel that delights in the particular definition of severely outlined details and the ornamentation of a fully voluptuous mass. This attention to intricate detail may also be observed in the headdresses of the Dancing Tara and her musical deities of the inner shrine and in the vegetative plentitude of the lotus and the headdress of the *bodhisattva* in the panel depicting the Ashtamahabhaya form of Avalokiteshvara on the *mandapa* wall. Also, in contrast to the severity of the flat planes of column, floor and ceiling and the straight edges of column and frame—pure form which encourages contemplation—is the warmth of the energy in the contained but potentially eruptive female figures. Given no outlet because of the compressing outlines, explosive energy is internalized. Within an atmosphere of quiet restraint is a simmering containment of passion. On the whole, the artists delighted in extreme contrasts in forms which were reflecting the prevailing theologies.

Three hundred years before, figures of the Buddha at Mathura had first sought to give expression to the concept of *nirvana* using the human form as vehicle. In an imaginative and innovative burst of suprahuman artistic energy at Ajanta

in the 5th century, gigantic figures of seated Buddhas with accompanying sculpture had been introduced into the void of the shrine. This seemingly sudden indrawing of figurative sculpture from the outside into the interior depths of the mountain can be explained as being a reversion to the ubiquitous shrine-icon associations which had most likely existed in India in earlier times when temples and idols had been constructed of perishable materials. The conception in the shrine came to be that of an aggregate unit of varying forms. At Ajanta this marked the lithic announcement to the world of a new formula for Buddhism. The Buddha, now no longer merely a historical figure, nor only a great teacher, having been deified despite his admonitions to the contrary, deserved placement within the innermost and deepest position in the temple, the shrine. Accompanying flying figures, *bodhisattavas* and worshipers were also incorporated and arranged at Ajanta within spacious shrine areas, but later, in the Buddhist shrines at Aurangabad and Ellora, the relationship of space and volume changed. Now smaller spaces were crammed with an increased amount of volumes which seem always to be on the verge of exploding the spatial confines of the shrine which they occupy. These are veritable store-houses of sculpture, compressed into the womb of the mountain. In an effort to spread Buddhism beyond the limits of the Theravada, which had concentrated on monasticism and abstract theology, Mahayana Buddhism sought to reach and serve the people by means of iconic proliferation.

At Ajanta, and in the more or less contemporary caves at Aurangabad, the forms in the head, torso and limbs become massive, especially in the Cave 7 Buddha shrine. The huge volumes are solid, heavy and dense, swollen with concentrated energy expanding from within. Each is a pure, geometrical abstraction. Surfaces are smoothed, with ornamentation eliminated, the plane transitions are modified, and the outline is continuous and uninterrupted in accordance with a style classical in spirit.

At Aurangabad, with the exception of Cave 5, all the Buddhas are seated in *pralambapadasana,* with thighs spread apart and feet resting on the lotus pedestal. The Buddha sits on an intricately decorated throne *(simhasana)* which bears numerous symbolic references including couchant lions at the base. His hands, in the pose indicating the teaching of the *dharma (dharmachakrapravartana mudra),* meet in a gesture denoting the wheel of the law, extended in front of the chest. The seated position, appearing earlier in the Gandharan reliefs and in the art of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, was probably based on Roman models. Royal portrait sculpture at Mathura and in Western India had also incorporated the same compositional design which was then first adopted for the shrine of the Buddha at Ajanta in the 5th century.

The association of the Buddha with royal authority refers to the sovereignty of his teachings and of Buddhahood. He is identified as the 'lion of the Sakyas,' in an analogy with the power and the strength of the lion. It may have pleased the local rulers to establish connections between themselves and the divine authority. The later *pralambapadasana,* at times substituting for but not entirely replacing the lotus position of the legs *(padmasana)* probably is related to the movement away from the earlier Buddhism, with its emphasis on reclusive meditation, towards the Mahayanists' association with compassion for the world.

These walls are profusely carved with a multiplicity of interacting forms, and they are thus charged with energy. The Buddha's figure within the shrine seems to gather and indraw all the aggregate forces into the single concentrated mass of stone, unifying in the inside of the cave what was fragmented on the outside. The many external forms have been reduced and incorporated into the gigantic totality, the Buddha. The progression of the devotee serves to bring him from the external world of teeming forms, represented by the *bodhisattva* panels in the *mandapa,* via the Tara figures in the vestibule *(antarala)* which are simpler, and finally towards the Buddha, the large boulder-like mass. The devotee literally physically undergoes the ritual of penetration, passing from outside to inside, from the temporal to the sacred Self; encouraged first by the males and then by the females, he ultimately is in confrontation with the Buddha in the full void of the shrine, with the Buddha that *is* the full void of the shrine, representing bliss through *nirvana.* He absorbs into himself all the fragmented and transmutable forms which are destined for final unification in the single dense entity within the shrine.

Playing an important role in the Buddhist caves of both Aurangabad and Ellora, the female *bodhisattvas (bodhishaktis)* conform to Tantric rites. This is an indication that the Indian imperative to worship the goddess had not been entirely superceded by the atheistic and aniconic philosophy of early Buddhism. Repressed longings for the ancient worship of the mother goddess were continually reemerging during the centuries under study. While in their external appearance the females cannot but be viewed as the epitome of beckoning sensuality, especially in Cave 7, in the subconscious they still excite fear, awe, submissiveness, reverence and identification which was, and still is, the habit of the Indian mind. Speaking a language comprehensible to the worshiper, who has not yet understood the total message of renunciation, they invite, they cajole, they silently tell in hushed whispers, in darkened corners, of the joys of *nirvana.*

This takes place in an atmosphere of ever-changing light which enters through

the doors. A reversal of this process, in a movement away from the centre, can best be observed by sitting at the Buddha's feet in Cave 7, looking out through the series of three rectangular voids of the doors—vertical rectangles which recede in size. The doors reflect the perpetual transformation which is the nature of phenomenal reality. It is both dark and light at the same time. How it appears depends entirely on where the person is situated. Looking inwards, the rectangular voids are black; looking outward from within the shrine, they are drenched with light during the day, while in the evening, as the sun falls, the distinctions between light and dark are obliterated as diffused light enters, all edges are lost, mass and space are fused, shadowy forms seem to appear and disappear. Finally, all merges into a single experience with little differentiation. There are no longer any opposites. This is the best time to appreciate that the Buddha in the shrine is drawn outwards towards the external world, while at the same time, the shadowy light still insistently moves in ever-lessening brightness towards the Buddha.

When the worshiper has entered the shrine, he has reached the last and grandest stage in the ascent which began in the valley below. The three successive door pedestals are lit by reflected light representing the last three steps in the ascent towards the Buddha. He gazes from the darkness on to the plains and the sky outside. Talented devotees may be able to internalize the physical representation of the Buddha and gain the necessary strength thereby for the descent. Eventually the devotee must once again turn around and face his phenomenal aspect; he must move away from the large single form and leave the Buddha for another cyclical plunge into the mainstream of existence. And outside, green parrots fly from the nest to remind of the world of flux one leaves behind upon entrance into the experience of the cave.

In the progression from the external world towards the centre, the devotee experiences physically what the *mandala* provides for psychically. The *mandala,* as we have seen, is a geometrical symbol, a two-dimensional design of various complexities which systematizes a series of relationships of deities within a circular field of squares and triangles, a device used to support meditation. Tantric rituals revolve around the worship of these deities, manifestations of the Absolute, which is symbolized by the central point. Guardians of four cardinal doors repel but also invite the devotee to enter into a universe ruled by numerous deities whose importance increases as the centre is approached. Entrance into the *mandala* releases the devotee from the shackles of the round of rebirths *(samsara).* Prescribed meditations help to bring the devotee into an identification with the central deity to reach the centre of his own being.

The ascent and movement towards the Buddha in the centre of the cave is a process analogous to the progression towards the centre of the *mandala*. Indeed the cave itself is conceived as a three-dimensional *mandala*. Basing his conclusions on a Japanese manuscript of the Shingon cult which was of Indian origin, John Huntington has shown that the elements and the iconographical placements of the figures in Caves 6 and 7 is the architectural representation of the union of *mandalas* symbolically conjoining *karuna* and *prajna*. The deities in the caves and their placements conform with those of specific *mandalas*.

Even from the start of the adventure the Buddha is always visible, as the devotee proceeds inwards through the doors towards the shrine. In Cave 7 the outer wall with the *bodhisattvas* and the vestibule wall with the Taras, in a determined progression from the outside to the centre, are interacting parts comparable with the elements of the *mandala*. Since the cave is three-dimensional, the square void of the shrine can be conceived of as being housed within the larger square and rectangle of the excavation, consisting of the void of the circumambulatory pathway *(pradakshinapatha)* intervening between the two wall masses, not unlike a series of Chinese boxes, one placed within the other. The constituent parts, the solid walls, are therefore conceptually although not visibly linked, as are the voids.

Cave 4 : The stupa

Cave Descriptions

Cave 4

As the winter sun rises in the northeast, its rays fall directly on the *stupa* in the *chaitya* hall, which is the earliest excavation. Architects, astronomers, mathematicians and artists, in a coordinated effort, may well have planned its construction as a feat of religious inspiration dedicated to the unity of environment and cave, to nature as the manifestation of Buddhahood, in interacting relationship with man's symbols.

Scholars differ as to the period of excavation, which is contemporaneous with similar *chaitya* halls in neighbouring sites in the Western Deccan from Ajanta in the northeast to Kuda and Mahad in the southeast. It may date to the 2nd century B.C., built as a separate hall for worship of the *stupa* by circumambulation, accompanied by *mantra* recitation and also for congregational meetings. Prior to this, the term *chaitya* was the designation for any sacred place : a tree or other holy ground or spot.

Bare of decoration, the restored set of columns are arranged in a series, forming aisles with flat ceilings, a nave and an apse with square corners. The ceiling is deeply vaulted showing a grid of uniformly spaced, curved, perpendicular and straight horizontal ribs, alternating mass with void, recession with projection in perfect rhythmic sequence. This serialization shapes an abstract pattern which the early architects fashioned in a delirium of creativity, basing their design upon structural models in wood. They set the standards for the *chaitya* hall for nearly a millenium, as it developed and became more complex. At the Ellora Visvakarman, which was the last *chaitya* hall to be built, there is still an insistent adherence to repetitive, evenly-spaced ribbing in the vault, in which the forms are reduced to elemental rhythms, providing an appropriate environment for worship of the Buddha principle.

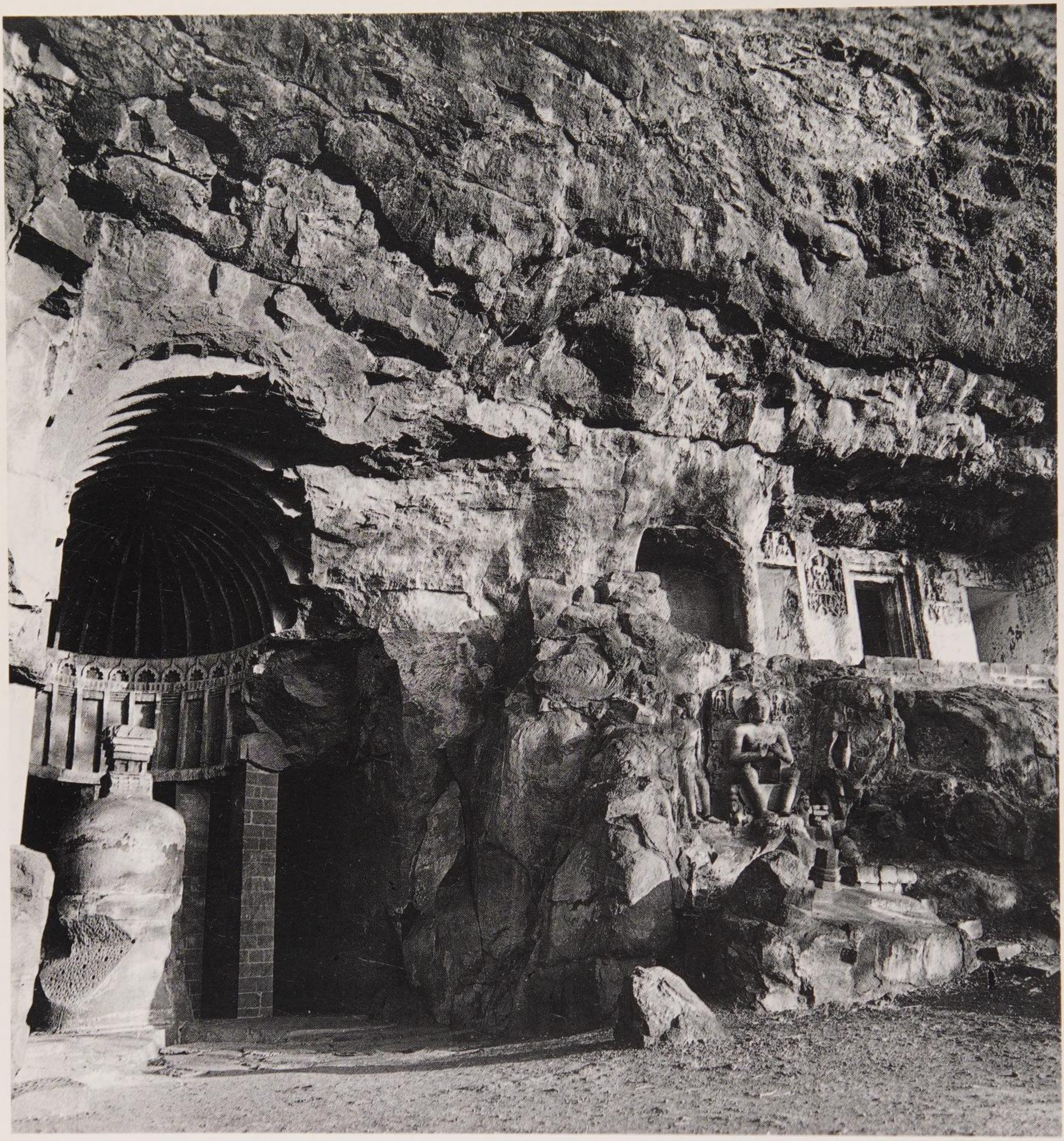
While the chronology of the caves is not within the scope of this book, a word of explanation will clarify the order in which they are arranged for this volume. This differs from the numerical order, based on location, now in use at the site. In regard to the development of style of the sculptures and the excellence of execution which will hopefully become evident from the descriptions, the chronology of the caves seems to fall into the following particular sequence :

Caves : 4, 5 1, 3, 7, 6, 2, 8, 9

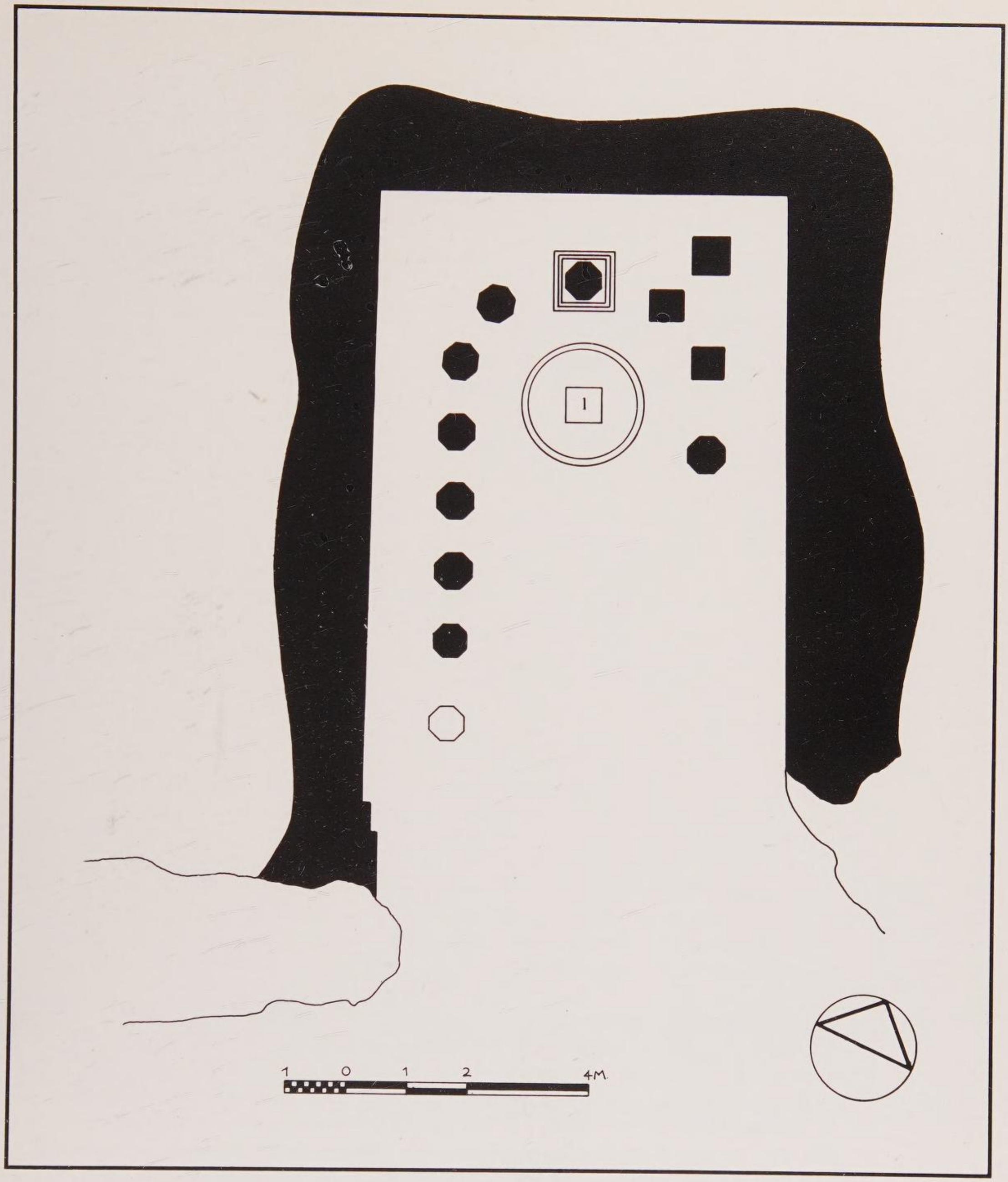
with the placement of Cave 3 remaining in doubt.

In regard to the directional indications, since, relative to the rising sun, each of the caves is situated on divergent axes and, as the caves are thus not horizontally aligned, the terms used are necessarily not an exact description of the orientation but are used merely for the sake of convenience. The entrance is specified as east, the back wall as west, with north and south shown in this relationship. The reader is requested to refer to the bottom of each groundplan for its precise orientation.

Dr. Bhattacharyya's identifications are printed in italics type.



Caves 4 and 5 :
From the viewer's left to right : the chaitya *hall; the recently discovered rock-cut figure of the Buddha and Cave 5*



Cave 4 :
1 : Stupa

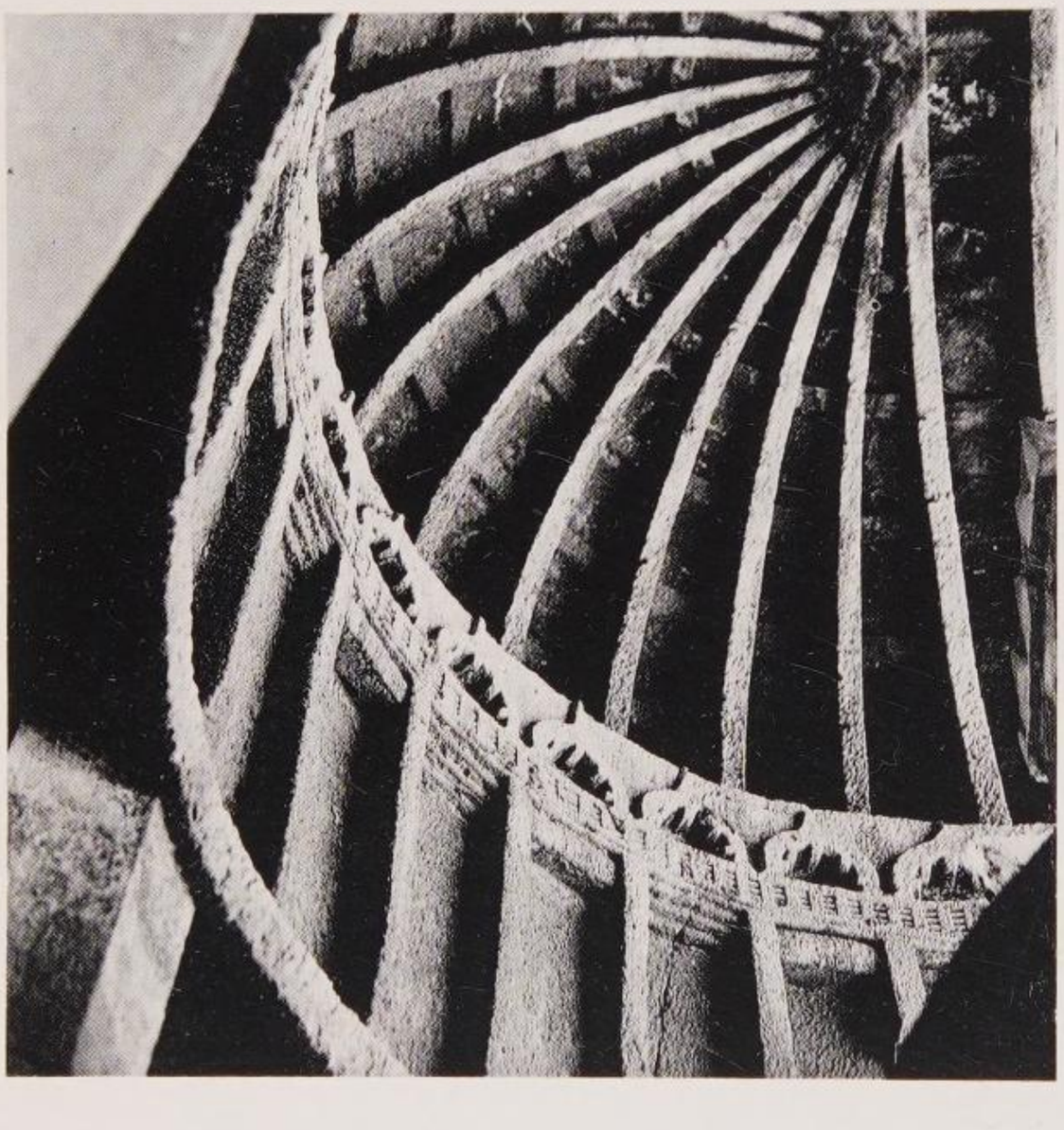
The columns carry a unique and elegant entablature which brought into the interior designs usually placed on the facade; the ribbings are placed vertically on a flat ground and are surmounted by a sequence of ordered railing and miniature *chaitya* patterns. As this form, flat on the sides, takes a curving turn at the apse, and as it meets the vault, it results in a coordinated system of curved, vertical and horizontal abstract linear effects which rarely have been equalled in purity of design.

The *stupa* is a world symbol for Buddhahood. Originally it was a burial mound in which relics *(dhatu)* or seeds of the Buddha and other spiritual leaders were enshrined. The egg-shaped hemispherical dome *(anda)* is the womb *(garbha)* where *nirvana* is potentiated. The Buddha exists in a timeless vacuum but may become manifested from the centre, emanating outwards to the four directions of the *stupa.* The vertical axis symbolizes the world pillar, connecting the various planes of the temporal and heavenly realms. Circumambulation of the *stupa* is identical with the symbolism of the *mandala* and of the approach towards the Buddha in the caves. As he moves clockwise around, with the *stupa* on his right, the worshiper is in process of being transformed. He has taken the plunge out of *samsara;* he observes himself as part of an interacting universe, having taken a step towards internalizing the god into himself.

The *chaitya* hall may well have been related to a number of simple *viharas* directly to the north. What is now Cave 5 is surrounded by excavations which have crumbled beyond recognition, but there are still hints at what may have been a coordinated unit of rock-cut structures.

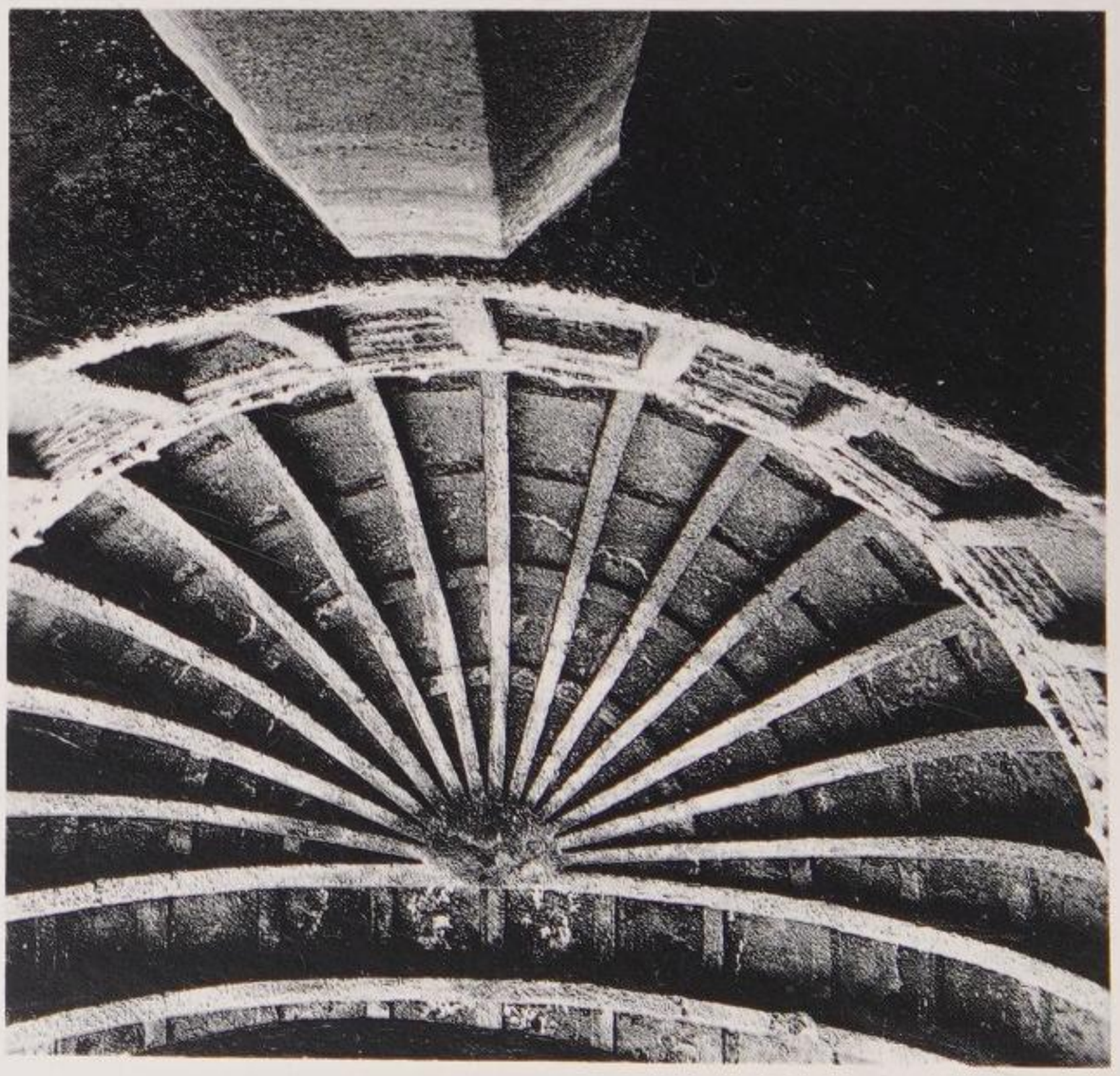
In 1977, the Archaeological Survey of India discovered a Buddha image carved directly in the living rock, which had been hidden behind much debris. The throne has horizontal divisions partially framing each theme, forms are bold and simply executed, massive volumes are least differentiated and are abstract. It appears to have been carved in the style of the 5th century. The Buddha is life-size, he sits in *pralambapadasana* with *dharmachakrapravartana mudra* on the lion throne *(simhasana)* and is accompanied by two large *bodhisattvas.* Set in the rock between Caves 4 and 5, it helps to coordinate the two structures.

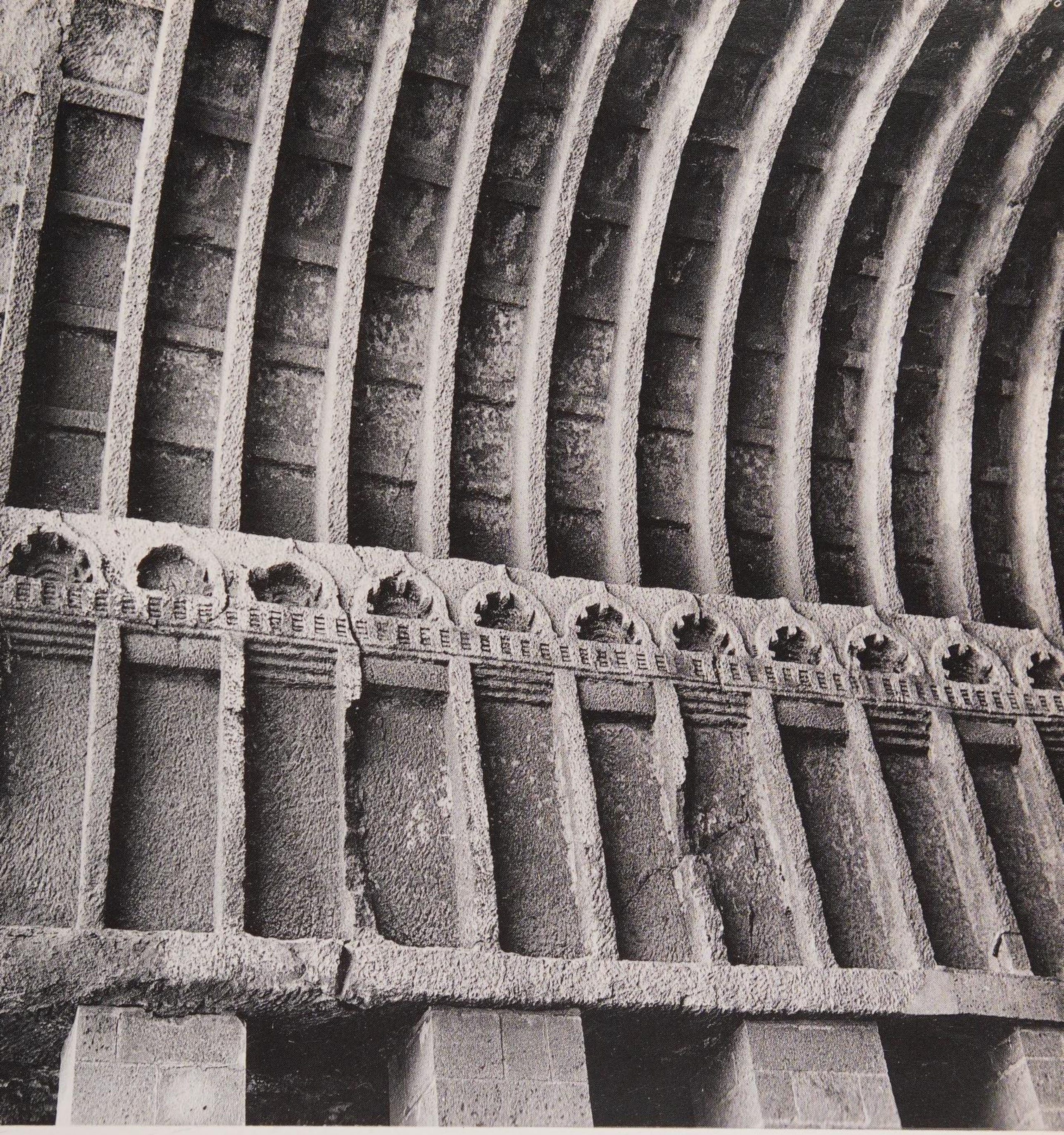
Cave 4 :
The **chaitya** ***hall with*** **stupa**



Cave 4 :

Details showing the horizontal and vertical-perpendicular ribbing, chaitya *and railing design*





Between Cave 4 and Cave 5 :
The rock-cut Buddha on the lion-throne flanked by bodhisattvas *(damaged)*

Between Cave 4 and Cave 5 :
The detail of the head of the Buddha

Cave 5 :

The Buddha sits in padmasana *with his hands in the* dhyana mudra;
the conch motif was carved on the pedestal by Jains of a later era

Cave 5 :

It seems possible that in the early period what is now Cave 5 may have served as part of a small complex of *viharas* to house monks attached to the *chaitya* hall, and that the present appearance is due to the ravages of time as well as to later modifications of the earlier structure.

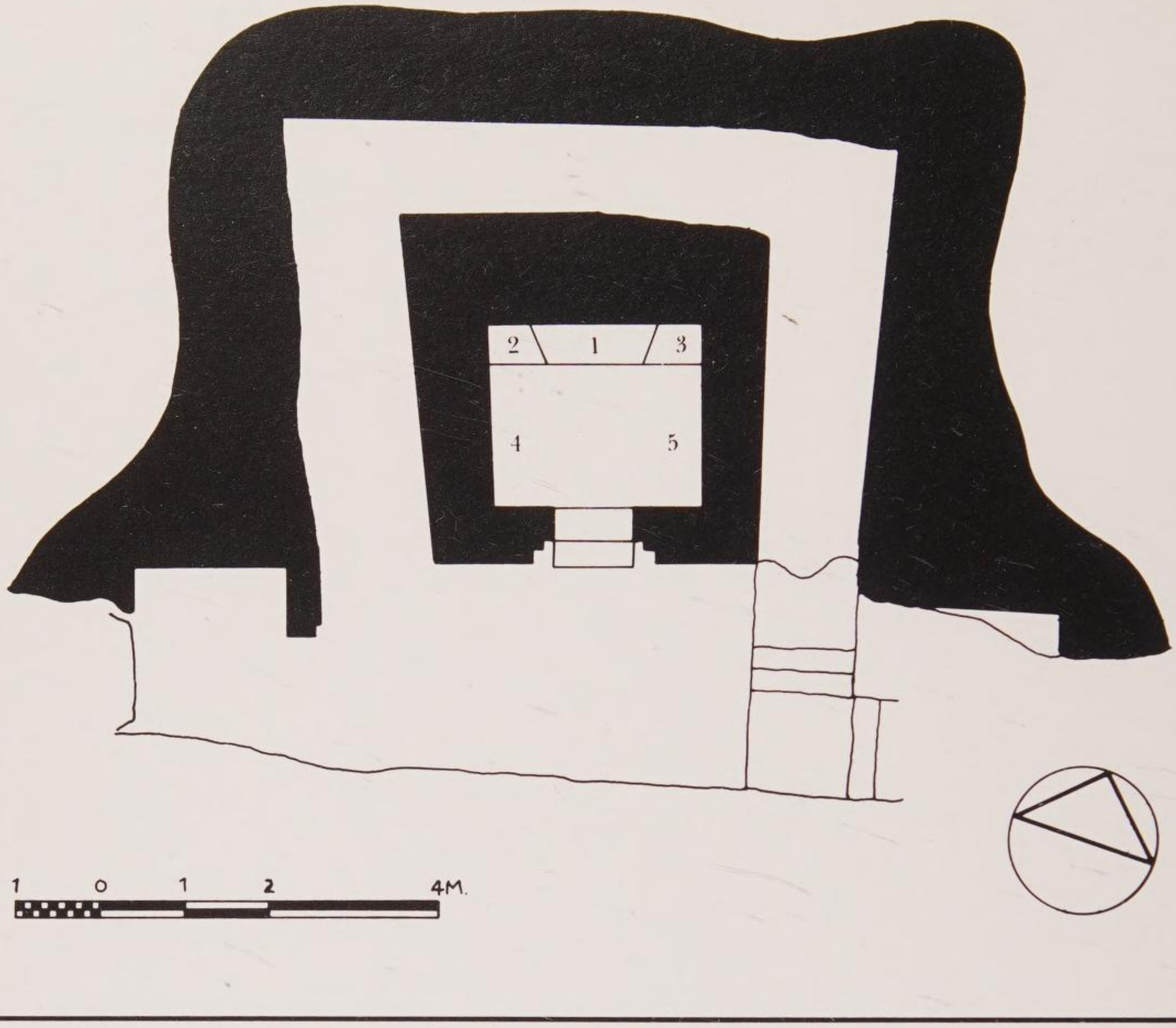
What remains is a very small shrine and circumambulatory path *(pradakshinapatha)* as well as traces of a hall *(mandapa).* Within the shrine is an image of the Buddha; its classic integrity marks it as one of the finest of the period, the early 5th century, when the image of the Buddha came to be installed in shrines for worship. The style and position of the hands and legs differs from all the other Buddhas at the site : those in Caves 3,7,6,2 and the rock-carving between Caves 4 and 5.

> *The hands have palms facing upward, resting on the lap* (dhyana mudra) *and thighs extending and resting on the seat, calves crossed in the* padmasana *or lotus position.*

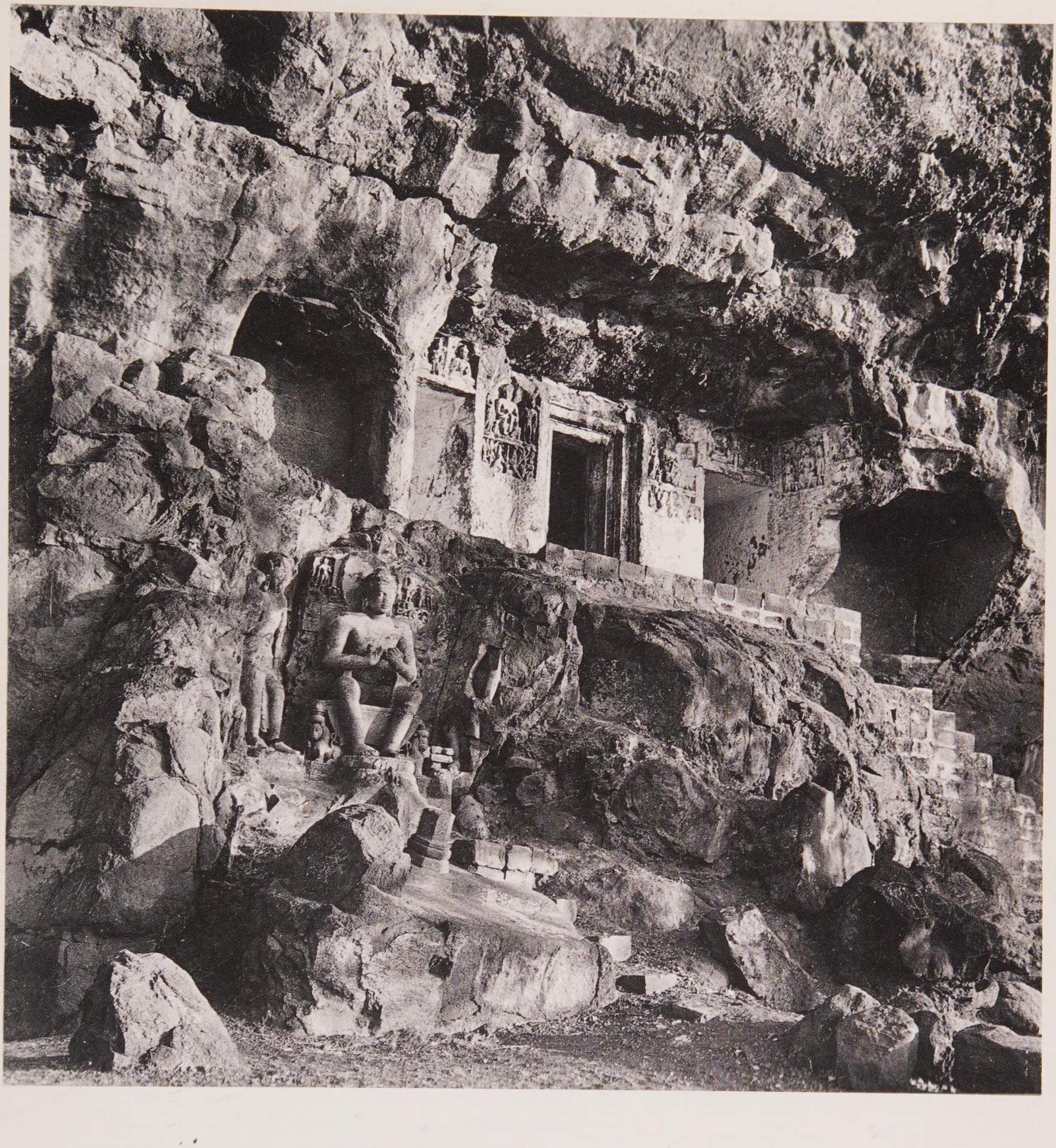
This is an early position, popular in Gandhara and Mathura in the early centuries A.D. Most of the shrine Buddhas at Ajanta hold their hands in the teaching *mudra : (dharmachakrapravartana).* The reappearance here of the *dhyana mudra* raises questions as to when the cave was constructed. The 5th century Sarnath Buddhas in the same position may have inspired this one, although one must point to the 8th century Cave 12 Buddhas at Ellora some of which also sit in *padmasana* with *dhyana mudra* to understand the difficulties of dating according to positions. The style here reflects a time earlier than the other Mahayana caves at Aurangabad. It is possible that the *chaitya* hall had been in continuous use since the time it was built, and that in the late 4th or early 5th century the new emphasis on iconic representation and the ritual of circumambulation of a Buddha image was responsible for alterations in the construction of Cave 5.

Classic integrity makes this Buddha comparable with some of the finest of the period. It is somewhat three-dimensional with mildly convex forms and fluid, unbroken oulines showing little angularity. The parts flow into one another harmoniously with no sharp transitions, and all views are interrelated. Because of its unity of form, it is a very important though neglected work. There is no throne, the base is plain, all is without accretions, and the surfaces are smooth and simplified.

The Buddha is nestled within a hollow created by the arch of the flanking *bodhisattvas :*



Cave 5 :
1. Buddha
2. Avalokiteshvara
3. Maitreya (?)
4, 5. Buddha and bodhisattvas *in various postures*



Cave 5 :
A view from the southeast

Avalokiteshvara is on the right and another *bodhisattva,* possibly Maitreya, (identification by C.B.) is on the left of the Buddha. Rotund cherubs, bearing garlands, are as chubby and round as those in Cave 1, Ajanta, carved with attention to the three-dimensionality characteristic of the classic style which is lacking in the later flying figures at Aurangabad. The *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara on the Buddha's right has a charming relaxed bend at the knee, and a deerskin head is slung over his shoulder.

On the south and north walls rectangular and arched squares frame small Avalokiteshvara-Maitreya-Buddha elements.

Cave 1 :

Cave 1 is situated near the top of the hill, the first in the series of the southern caves. Probably due to the porous nature of the rock at this particular place, work was abandoned long before its completion. Judging from the eight elaborately carved, serialized columns, it may be assumed that the original intention was to attempt to outdo the successes at Ajanta's Cave 1. The columns in turn were precursors of the beautifully ornamented columns of Cave 3 here.

At the southern wall of the largely deteriorated porch, a rectangular panel represents :

Seven Past Buddhas (Atita Buddha) seated in the
bhadrasana *pose with* dharmachakrapravartana mudra

The six past Buddhas are :

Kanakamuni, Kashyapa, Krakucchanda, Shikhi, Vipashyi, and Vishvabhu
The seventh is
Sakyamuni
Attending them, standing are the two traditional lieutenants of the Buddha :
Sariputra and Maudgalyayana, disciples of the Buddha

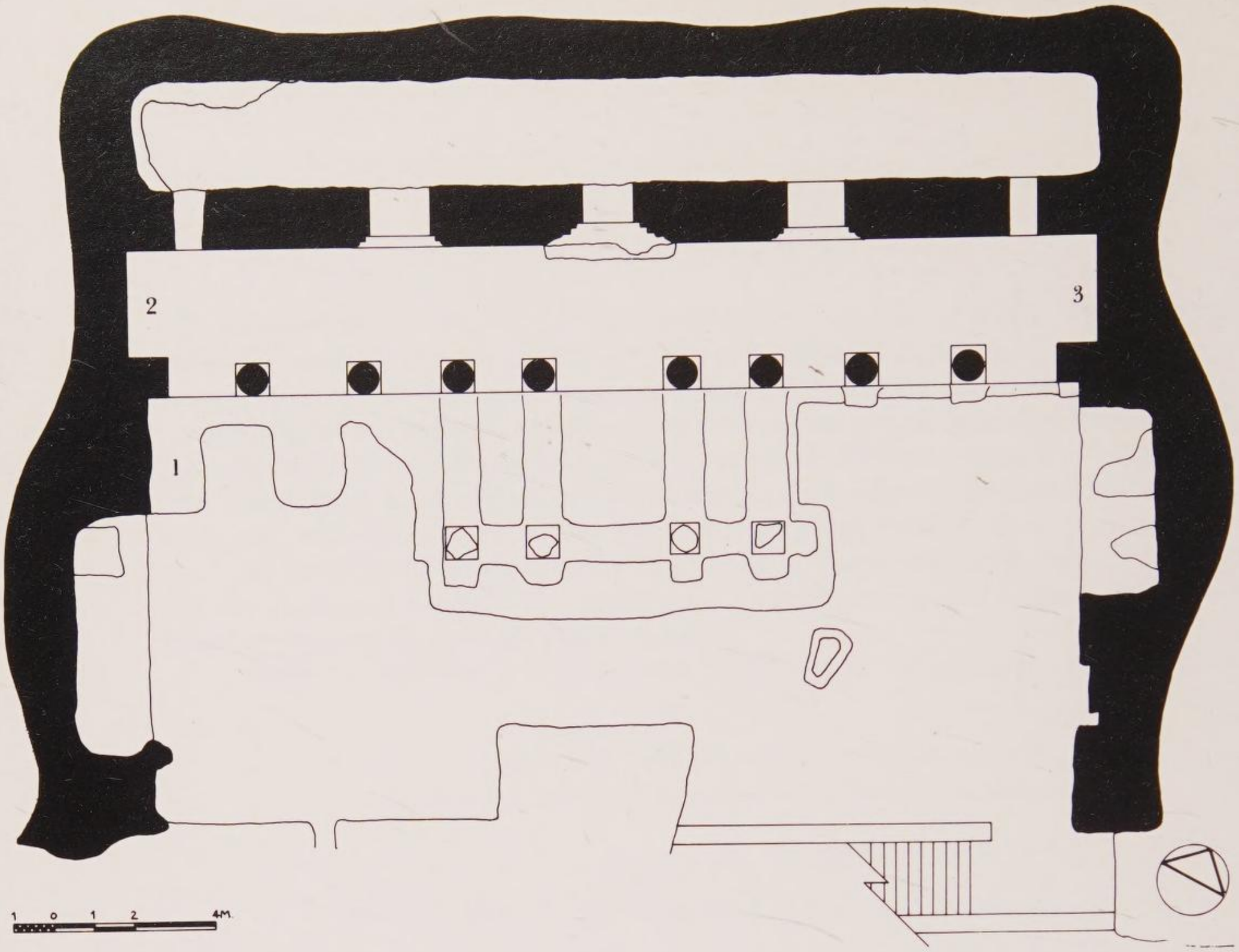
Attached to the capitals and linked to the columns are female fertility figures :

shalabhanjikas; *they are shown as the Buddha*-shaktis *or the* prajnas *or* shaktis *of the five* Dhyani *Buddhas.*

This interconnection between human and vegetative fecundity, the artistic legacy from the distant past, predating Buddhism, was persistently repeated from Bharhut to the pre-medieval art at Ellora.

The columns are divided into sections. There are squarish blocks with dwarf-like playful creatures *(ganas)* at the corners; rounded shafts with vertical and horizontal ornamental bands, riders on mythical animals *(sardulas)* and flying figures *(vidyådharas)*; and carved bas-reliefs on the bases of the brackets, each with four projections. In addition there are loving couples *(maithuna)* in lotus medallions and one with a 'face of glory' *(kirti-mukha).*

The facade wall is pierced with windows, two small side doors and an elaborate central portal. The window frames are decorated with *maithuna* couples and abstract linear designs, alternating with lotus and lotus leaf



Cave 1 :
1. Seven past Buddhas
2, 3. Mahapratiharya

Cave 1 :
The columns fronting the porch with the Seven Past Buddhas on the south wall

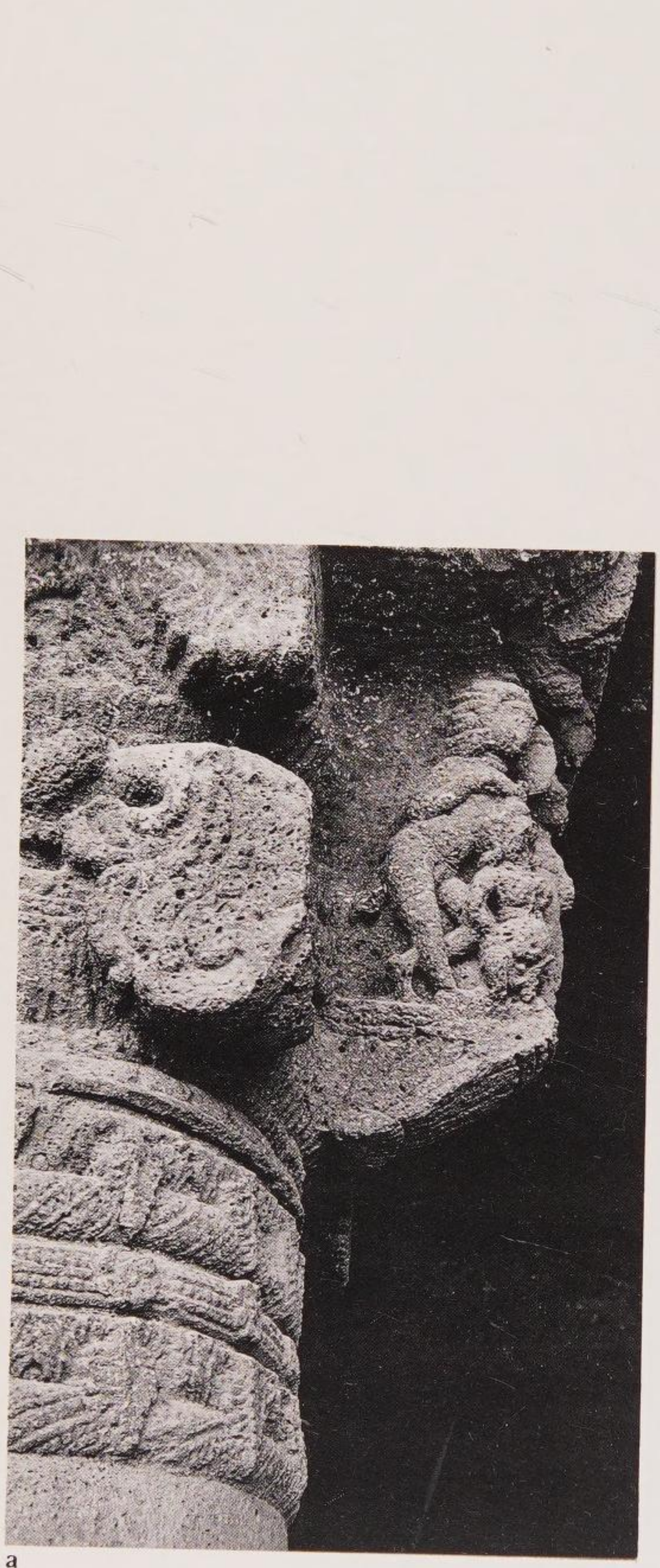
Cave 1 :
A playful dwarf-like creature on a column

< Cave 1 : South wall of the porch

The Seven Past Buddhas (Atita *Buddha) seated in the* bhadrasana *pose with* dharmachakrapravartana mudra : *The six past Buddhas : Kanakamuni; Kashyapa; Krakucchanda; Shikhi; Vipashyi; Vishvabhu; and the seventh : Sakyamuni; they are accompanied by the traditional lieutenants of the Buddha, his disciples : Sariputra and Maudgalyayana.*

Cave 1 :
Fertility figures shown as the Buddha -shaktis *or the* prajnas *or* shaktis *of the five Dhyani Buddhas*

Cave 1 :
A shalabhanjika *on a column*



a

b

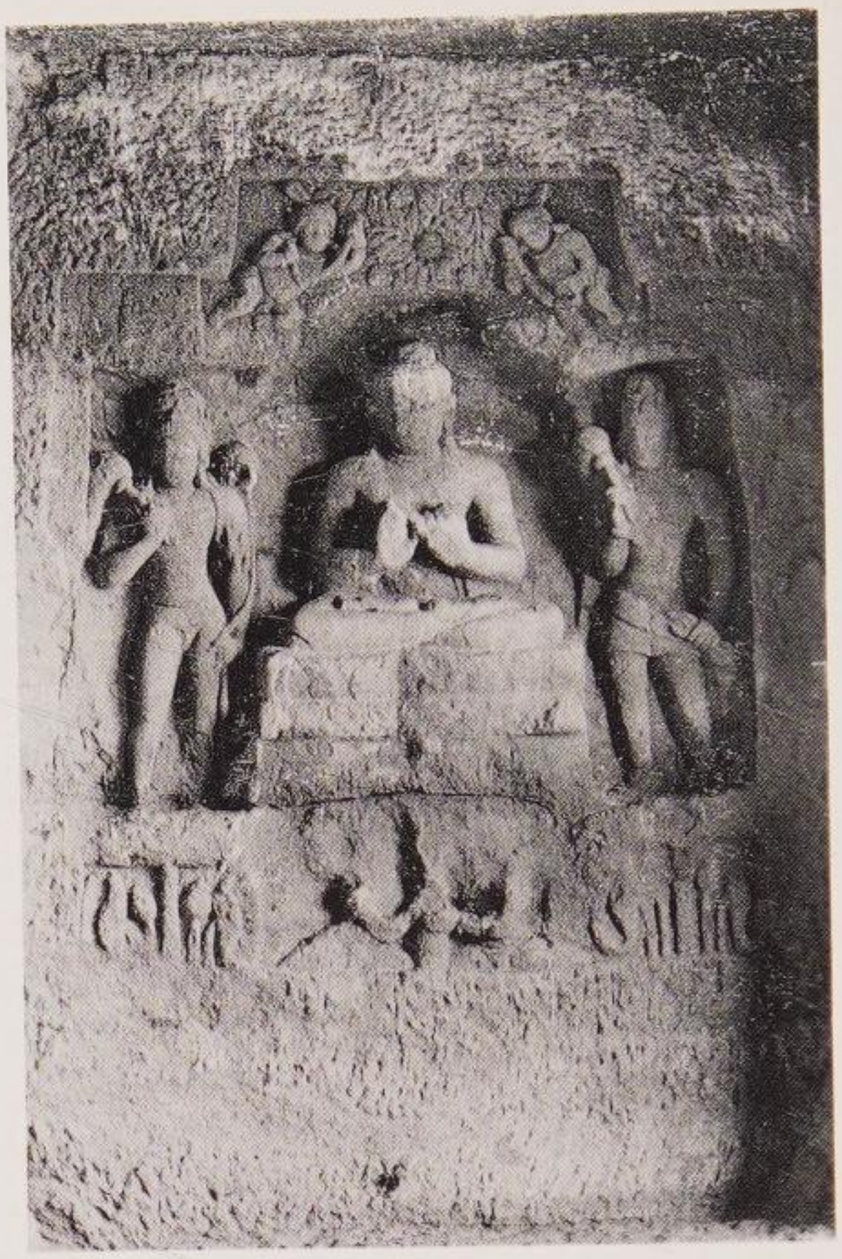
c

a *Cave 1 : Shalabhanjika on column*

b *Cave 1 :*
A part of a column with a bracket

c *Cave 1 :*
A column with a maithuna *couple in a horizontal band with* kirti-mukha *and* makara torana

Cave 1 : The south portion of T-shaped door lintel
Ganga on the makara

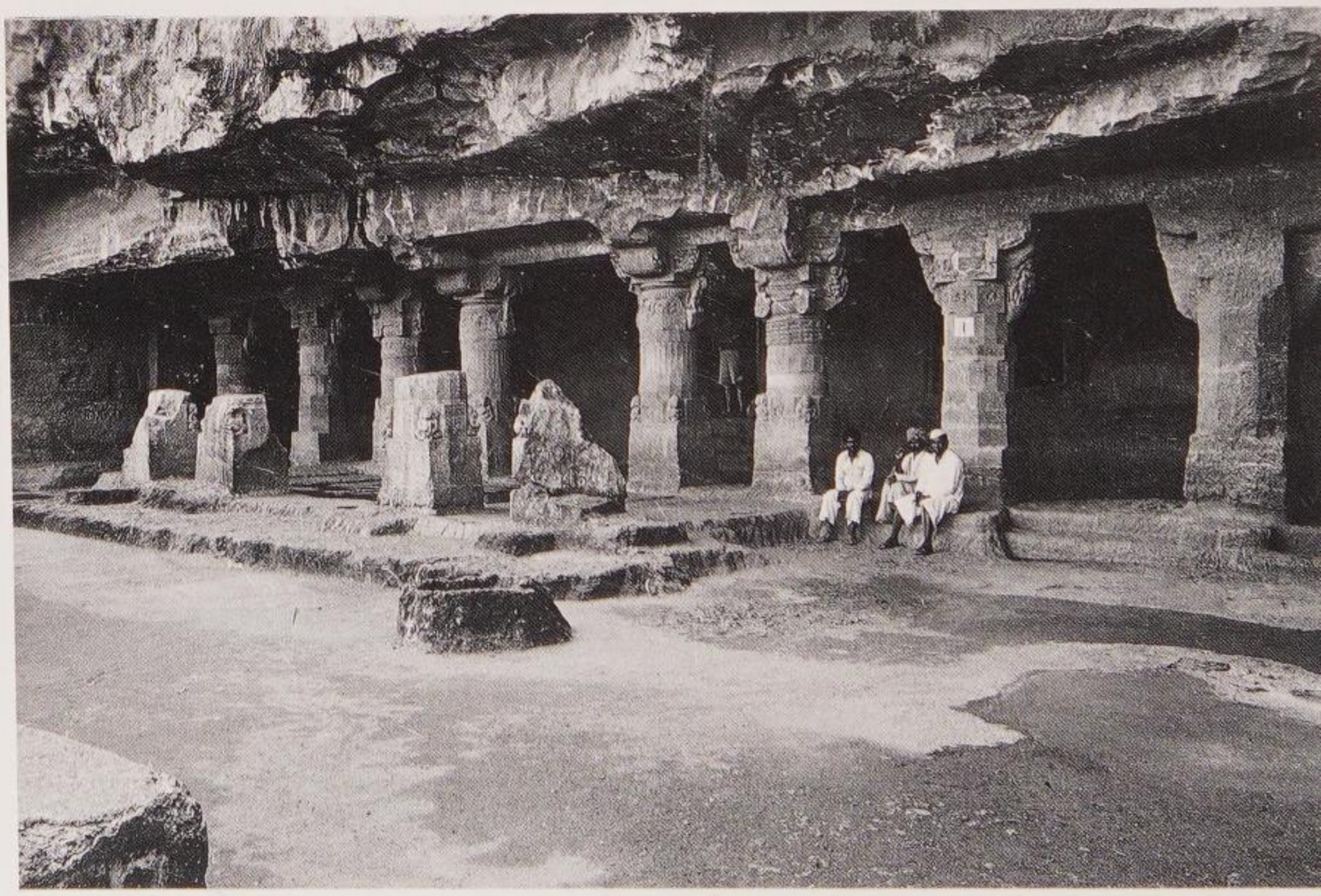


Cave 1 : The north panel of the porch

Mahapratiharya : *the Buddha sits in the* padmasana *with his hands in* dharmachakrapravartana mudra. *On his right, Avalokiteshvara wears the deerskin on his arm, and on his left, Vajrapani holds the* vajra *in his left hand;* nagas *uphold the stalk of the lotus.*

Cave 1 : The south panel of porch

Mahapratiharya : *the Buddha sits in* padmasana *with hands in* dhyana mudra. *On his right, Avalokiteshvara wears the deerskin on his shoulder, and on his left, Vajrapani holds the* vajra *in his left hand;* nagas *uphold the stalk of the lotus*



Cave 1 :
A view of the court

patterns. Near the ceiling, at the sides of the T-shaped doorframe, the river goddess Ganga on the mythical beast *(makara)* is carved twice. The T-shape for portals as well as the meander on the door jamb travelled from the Roman territories and indicates the wide distribution and interchange of architectural components now placed in new combinations. The miniature shrines on the lintel above the door lie on a flat plane and are not recessed. Later, in Caves 3, 7 and 6, more depth with rhythmic effects is achieved on the lintel decoration. Some erotic couples and a simple form of meander decorate the door jamb, which has five vertical divisions. The pilasters of the doorway with lotus capital and the 'vase of plenty' motif *(purnaghata)* are elegantly narrow, as in paintings at Ajanta. On each side of the steps leading to the unfinished hall *(mandapa)* stands a serpent prince *(nagaraja),* his consort and child.

Carved into the north and south wall of the outer porch, in large panels, Buddha sits on a broad lotus; the stalk is upheld by *nagas.*

This represents the

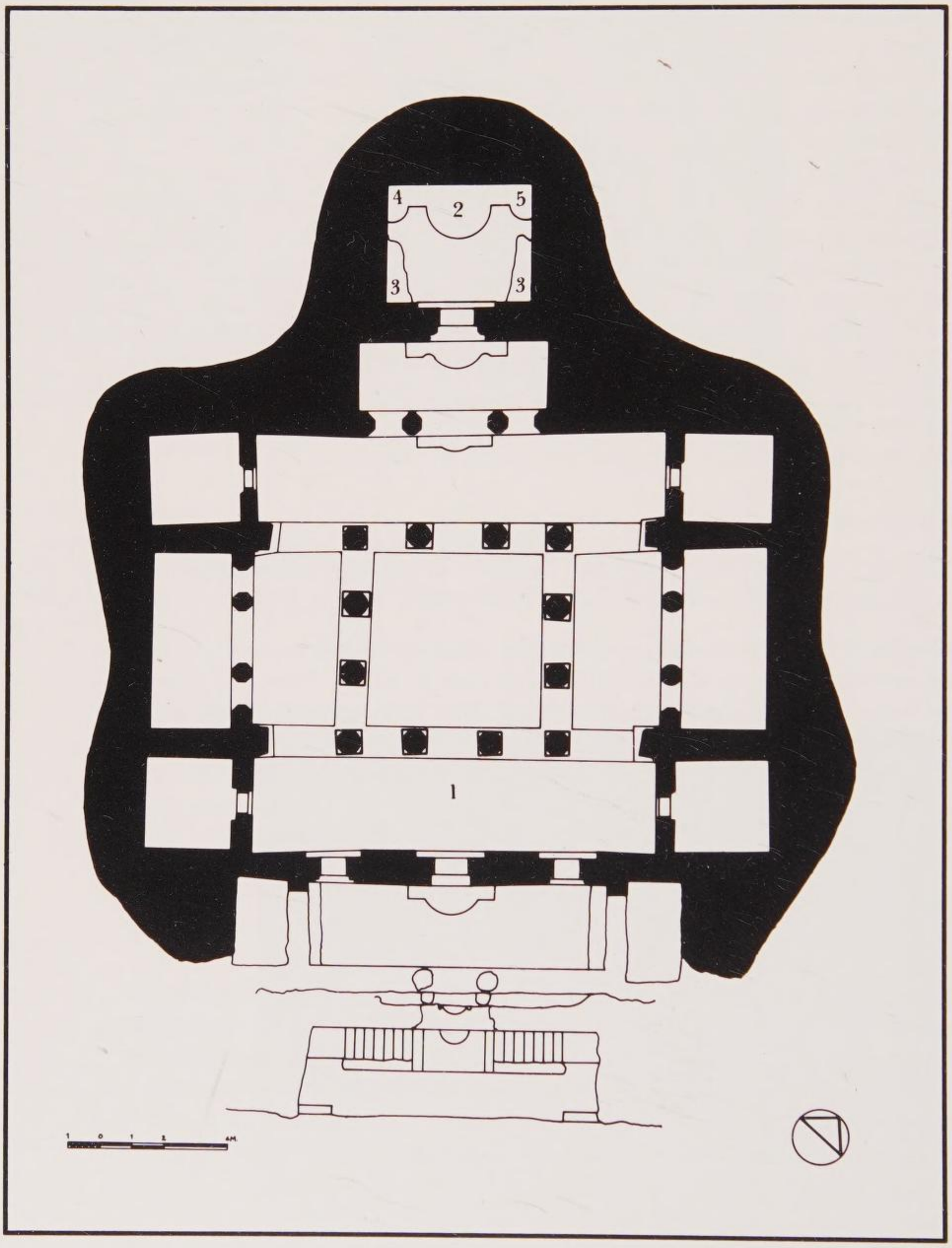
> *Great Miracle* (Mahapratiharya) *of the Buddha at Shravasti, in which the Buddha proliferated himself.*

The Buddha here has been substituted for the original folk theme of the female being born out of waters seen in extant works first at Sanci. This is a fine example of how the Buddhists accommodated their iconography to the already existing imagery of the people. Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani, to the right and left of the Buddha respectively, have not yet been accorded the status of large door guardians which were soon to appear at this site and at contemporary Brahmanical monuments.

> *The Buddha sits in* padmasana *and* dhyana mudra *in the south panel and in* padmasana *and* dharmachakrapravartana mudra *in the north panel.*

Avalokiteshvara holds a lotus and wears a deer skin over his left shoulder (south) and on his arm (north), while Vajrapani in both holds the thunderbolt *(vajra)* on the knot of his sash. The same depiction of the deerskin, which at Aurangabad reappears in Caves 2 and 5 may also be observed on a *Bodhisattva from Sarnath* in the National Museum in New Delhi. Travelling back and forth along the active trade routes, forms and iconography were shared by artists of many sites.

The *vajra* should especially be noticed in this early cave. Tantric philosophy was being expressed in plastic form. The *vajra* will reappear in Caves 6 and 2, as we shall see.



Cave 3 :
1. Jataka story entablature
2. Buddha
3. Attendant deities
4. Maitreya
5. Avalokiteshvara

Cave 3

The facade is composed of a plain central door; its lintel has flat bas-reliefs of small framed figures. The two side windows have carvings of framed *ganas* along the jambs.

A vital experience awaits the visitor as he enters the *mandapa*. There is an orchestration of space and volume; each of the volumes is at the same time magnetized towards the other and forced away. The geometrical substructure includes rectangular and square areas delimited either by rows of vertical columns and pilasters or by the lateral beams on floor and ceiling and by the walls. The space which permeates the cave coordinates the physical elements into a living whole. The flat and bare planes and the voids formed by door and window frames and the various masses are elements perceived and unified by the viewer whose propensity for patterning separate elements into a totality functions to coordinate all the constituent parts. While automatic visual responses multiply combinations as the viewer moves around, the schemes are completed by conceptualization when a particular view is obstructed. All the views in the cave are partial. It is not possible, for example, to photograph the interior of the cave in one frame. Every step reveals a different and unique aspect.

The organizing mind thus aids in the process of coordinating the separate basic building blocks of form. Numerous possibilities of basic aggregates can be identified. A few examples will serve to clarify this :

1) The vestibule coordinates itself with the two side chambers.
2) The four individual side aisles surrounding the columns are at the same time a continuous cloister.
3) The voids between the columns, or the dark and light voids framed by doors and windows interact; and
4) The series of columns seem to be united.

A complex combination of mobile patterns of mass, space, light and line is assembled in the mind of the perceiver who moves through the cave always formulating the aggregate concept which itself is not static.

The ground plan of the *mandapa,* with its surrounding aisles, porch, vestibule and cells for monks, reveals three squares burgeoning out from the central point, graduating in size, so that each fits into the next larger one, or they might be considered to be pressing inward with the central point acting as magnet. The situation may be compared to a series of Chinese boxes with

Cave 3 :
The facade, showing the door and two windows

everything relating to the central point. The ratio of the squares (or of concentric circles circumscribing the squares) is approximately 2:1:1. When the measurements in these caves are square, an underlying *mandala* may be inferred.

Unification of all elements occurs during the physical process of entering and moving towards the shrine, and in the subsequent retreat outward. The worshiper, in congruence with cosmic rhythms, repeats the movements of the sun, which penetrates and approaches the Buddha in the shrine and then recedes. The views perceived from different places and the variations in light reveal and hide, illuminate and obliterate form, which can be apparently a substantial solid but at times can disappear into shimmering variegations in the darkness, while it is the bold juxtaposition of geometrical masses, the continuum of repetitive elements permeated by space, that energizes the fundamental life in the cave.

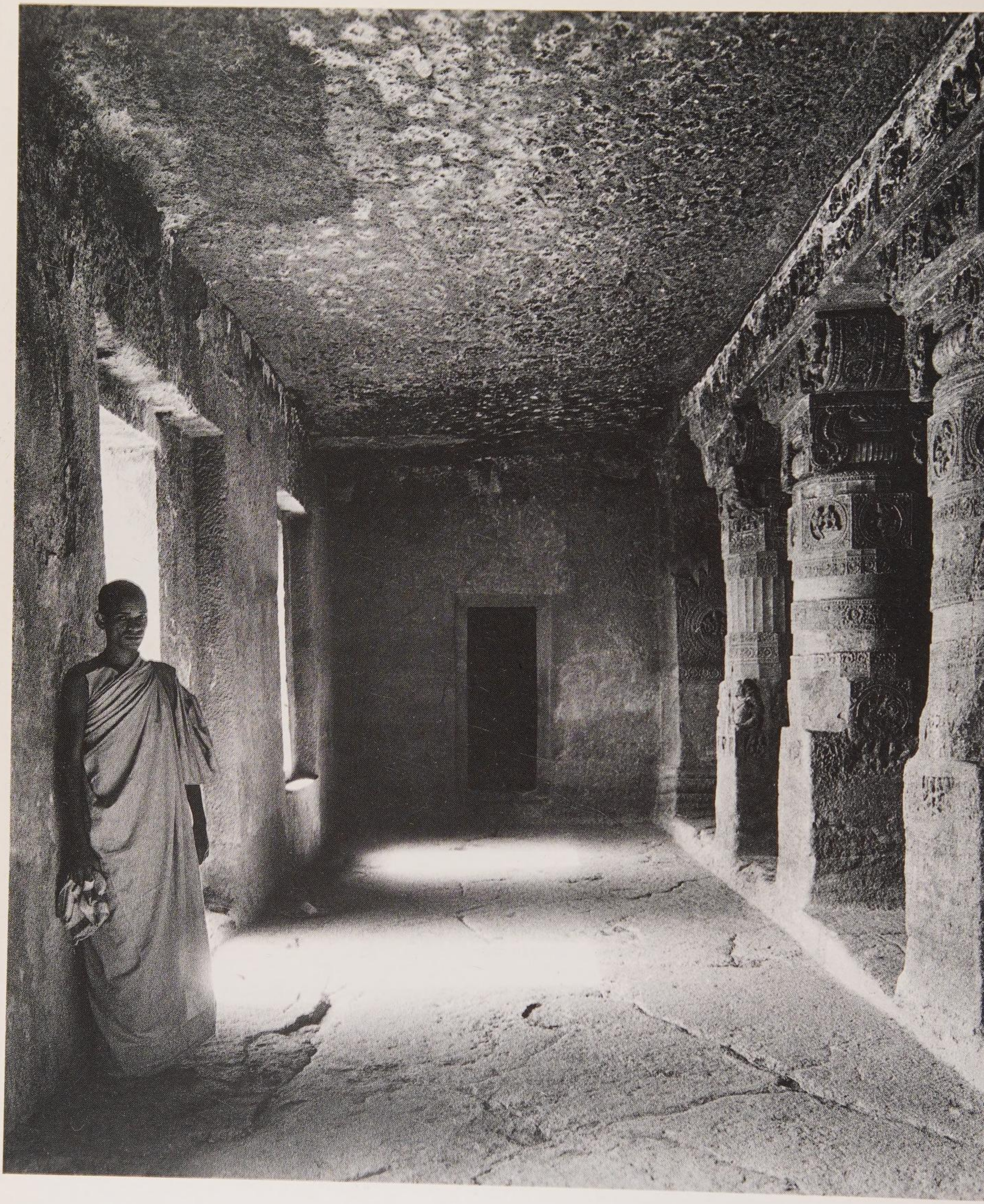
While the *vihara* provided accommodation for monks, it also served as an assembly hall for teaching, for ritual performances and ceremonies and as a transition area during the process of reaching the Buddha. The *mandapa* is a pronouncedly demarcated area distinctly separate from the shrine which houses the Buddha, *bodhisattvas* and worshipers and is related to it only by juxtaposition, in contrast to the *pradakshinapatha* caves, where the shrine is centrally located. The shrine is a peripheral void situated at the head of the entire structure, isolating within it the :

Trisharana :
Buddha
Maitreya (dharma) *and*
Avalokiteshvara (sangha)

thereby separating the sacred from the temporal. The central points of *mandapa* and shrine lie on a common axis which permits the sun to stream in and to shine directly on the Buddha at certain times of the year.

The ornate decorations on the columns, pilasters, entablatures and door frames serve as a contrast to the unadorned surfaces and also provide animation. The carvings represent a period when enthusiasm for ornamental proliferation had displaced the puritan aesthetic. This coincided with the prosperity and growing complacency of the monks and their patrons, the rulers and traders. There is a great deal of interest in many details, some finely carved with great precision, but some showing a decline in skill and overly worked.

The *mandapa* columns have the following elements in common : (1) a square



Cave 3 :
The front aisle lit by sunlight entering through the windows and the door.

slightly tapering base which is devoid of carving; (2) a cylindrical mid-portion profusely carved with details which differ from one column to another; (3) capitals with the *purnaghata* motif, some with foliage and (4) brackets on a square base. In addition to the twelve columns which circumscribe the *mandapa,* four more are at the entrance to the side chambers, although the two on the north are restored. The remaining two have been painstakingly worked, and they are distinguished by diagonally ribbed strips carved on the cylindrical mid-portion. These and two more narrow columns which lead into the vestibule have *shalabhanjikas.*

A marked feature of this cave, following in the Ajanta tradition, is the beautiful roundels carved on the four pilasters in the *mandapa;* they are surmounted by half-roundels and an overhanging half bracket, also profusely decorated. On the columns, all form is enclosed within firm linear horizontal or vertical frames, although the carving is constrained, limiting the fluidity. Roundels alternate with small groups of figures which are placed at the corners, at the top of the base. Within these boundaries all variety of vegetative, animal and human life is represented—a storehouse of narrative themes. The subject matter is playful, decorative or symbolic. *Sardulas, kirti-mukhas,* large *nagarajas* with attendants, *ganas* in various attitudes—seated or as dancer and caryatid—join musicians with flutes and drums and dancers whose angular movements lend life to the reliefs. A repeated theme is couples in dalliance, seated in various positions, sometimes alternating with geometrical linear patterns. There are a number of playful visual puns, for example, a lion has one face and two bodies, and many areas are decorated with diagonal and vertical fluting. Surmounting the columns are superb examples of brackets, decorated with a rectangular relief of seated couples with a *makara torana* flanked by a rider on a lion. Bands of lotus rosettes, pearl and floral designs and horizontal bands with leaf motifs on the columns are fancifully decorative.

Above the columns on the entablature beam is a sequence of rhythmic, alternately recessed and projected miniature South Indian shrine motifs, each a composite of vertical columns and horizontal stories *(talas)* whose bases reflect light and shade.

The architrave surmounting the columns at the entrance to the *mandapa* depicts scenes of a Jataka tale, previously erroneously identified as the Surasoma Jataka.

The total effect in the hall is one of contrast between profuse though contained and restrained ornamental surface carving on the one hand and pristine purity of the geometrical surfaces and volumes on the other. Ample space permeates all the volumes.

Cave 3 :
The columns of the hall, viewed from the outside of the hall

Cave 3 :
The columns of the hall, viewed from the inside of the hall

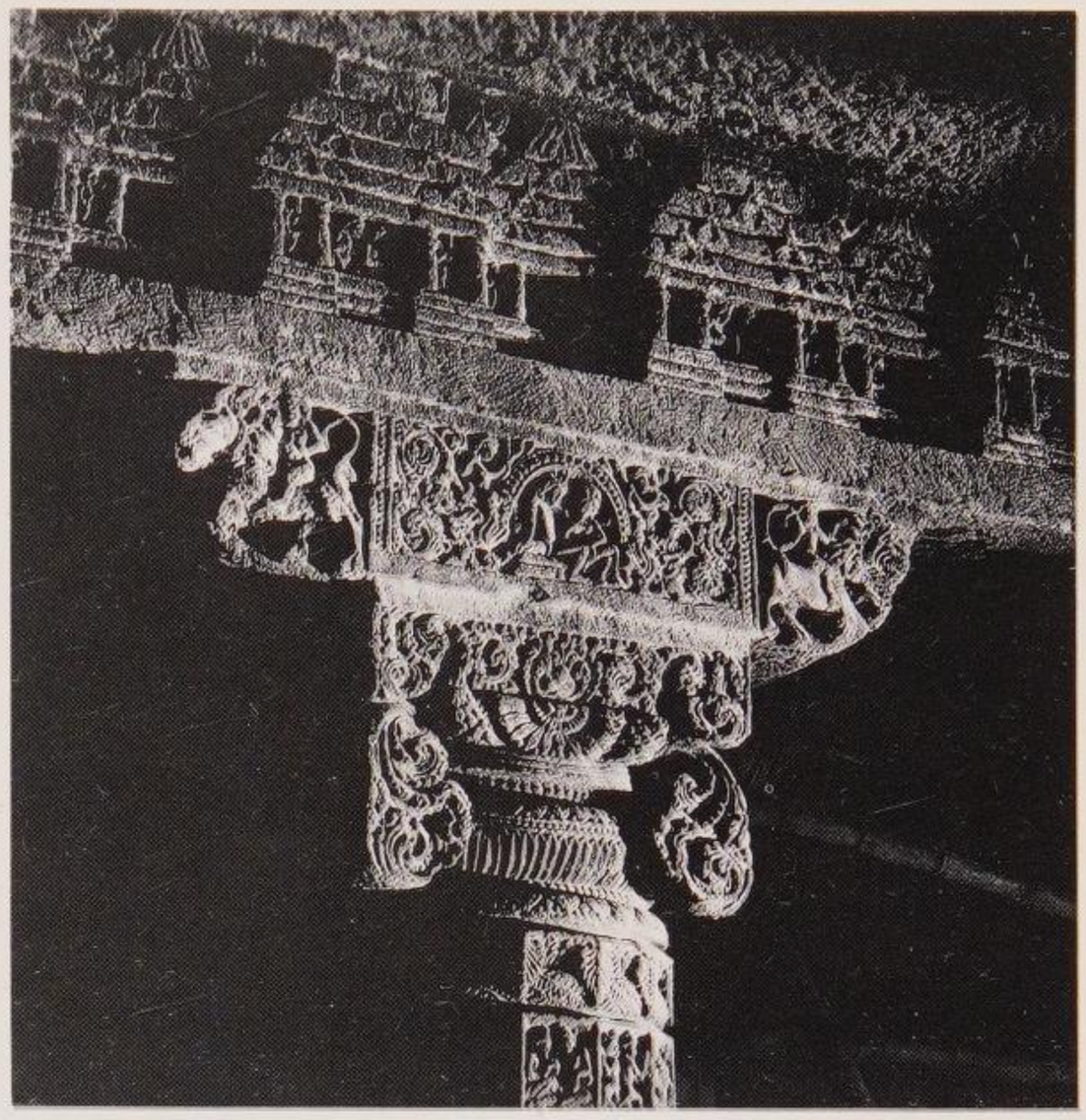
< *Cave 3 : South chamber*
A column separating the south chamber from the hall

Cave 3 : South chamber
A couple in dalliance in a roundel on a pilaster

Cave 3 : Mandapa
Details of the columns : a lion with two bodies and a single head

Cave 3 : Mandapa
Details of the column : couples in dalliance on a horizontal band

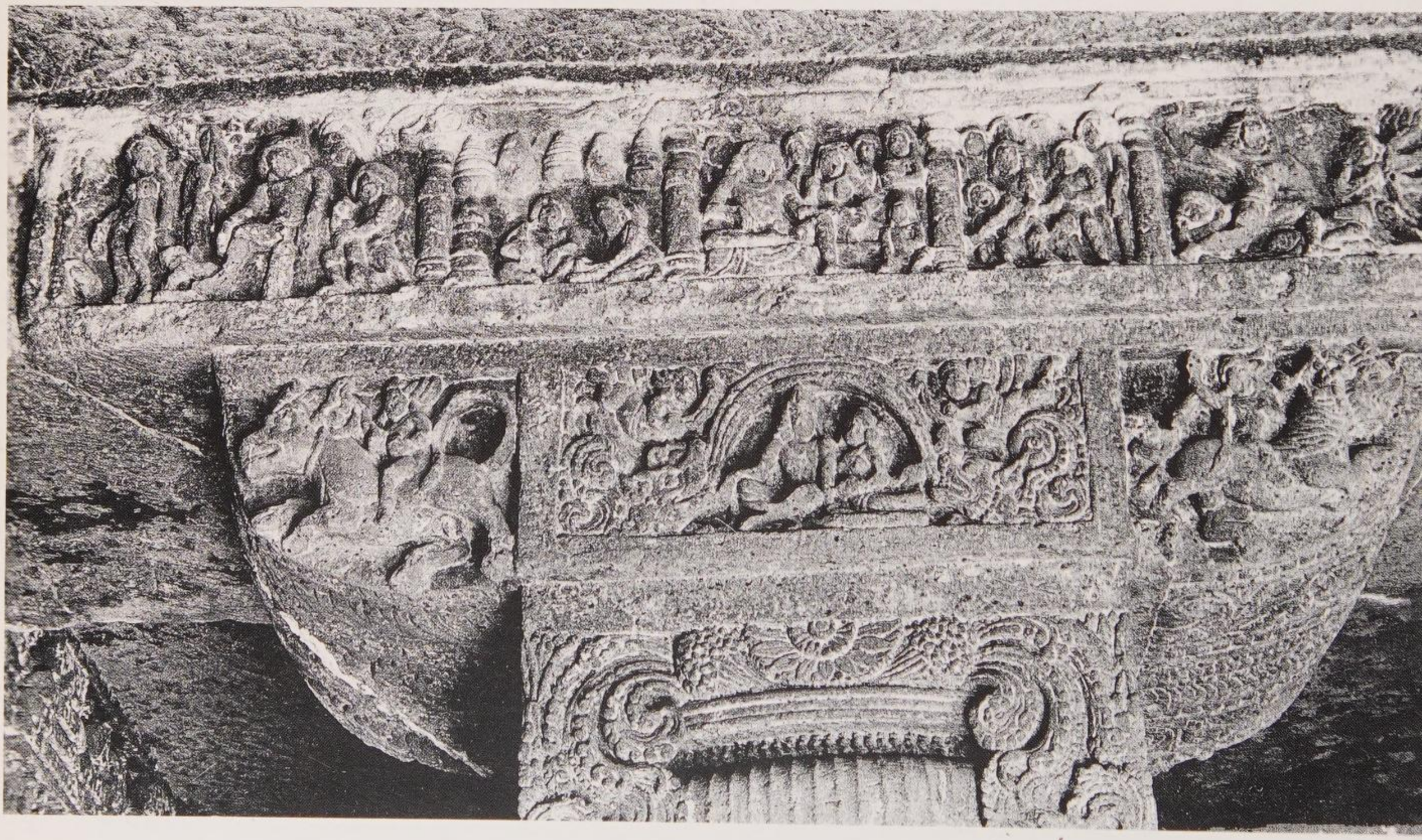
Cave 3 : Mandapa
Details of the column : a couple in dalliance in a roundel ; a half-roundel and a portion of the capital



Cave 3 : Mandapa
Details of the column : the 'vase of plenty' and the makara torana *motifs, surmounted by miniature shrines on the entablature*

Cave 3 : Mandapa
Details of the column : a couple in dalliance on a horizontal band, surmounted by a 'vase of plenty' motif

Cave 3 : Entrance to the vestibule
A fertility figure on the column at the entrance to the vestibule



Cave 3 : Mandapa : *east entablature*
A bracket with a couple in dalliance within a makara torana,
surmounted by a narrative depiction of an unidentified Jataka tale

In the progression towards the shrine, the visitor ascends to the *antarala,* which is a foot higher than the *mandapa.* Here all the phenomenal activity and fantasy aroused by the ornamentation on the *mandapa* columns is shed. The mood has changed.

The doorway to the shrine has twin slim pilasters which frame the inner jambs, carved with *maithuna* couples and *ganas* supporting a lintel of miniature temple replicas. The T-shaped frame for the portal shows both the river goddesses, Ganga and Jamuna, placed at the sides of the lintel close to the ceiling, while on the floor, guarding the doors, are two small but well carved *nagarajas.*

Inside the shrine, the figure of the Buddha, unlike the one in Cave 7, lacks true three-dimensionality; parts are not carved with tender attention to subtle plane transitions; they are disproportionate, with little authenticity of form. The ears are too large, the face is small and the neck is without power. The whole figure is lacking in grace and it actually borders on the ugly. Even the throne and lotus base for the feet are awkwardly compounded. A degeneration in style accompanies the encrustations of detail in the *mandapa.*

The dating of the cave is puzzling since it exhibits early as well as late features. The T-shaped door frame with river goddesses near the ceiling is usually early, although late examples do exist. Moreover the superb treatment of the attendant deities in the shrine would point to an early dating. On the other hand, excessive and less skilled carving in the ornamentation and the poor quality of the carving of the Buddha contradicts this assumption. Most scholars have not come to any definite conclusion although Walter Spink's date is 477 A.D. Cave 3 is placed here prior to Cave 7, even though some aspects of Cave 7 seem to be at least contemporaneous. Perhaps the variations in style and workmanship can be attributed to different workshops employed in the construction over a longer period.

Since there is mediocrity, it is a shock to realize upon entering the shrine that, hidden in the darkness, are two groups of kneeling attendant deities -- only three are female. They are exquisitely carved in the best traditions of classic art. This is surely the work of a great artist, unknown, but here made immortal. While Ajanta worshipers are carved in bas-relief on the walls of the shrine, a brilliant new conception is introduced; the figures are aligned in two separated groups, with each individual deity being placed in a different position and level of depth vis-a-vis the wall, ignoring the corners of the square shrine. They can well be imagined as free-standing configurations. The heads are juxtaposed in space, receding to the background in positions which are imaginative and

are new to the history of sculpture. These statues are all the more astonishing because of their appearance here in the darkness of the shrine. Added to the delight of finding these inventive compositions—as the eyes gradually become adapted to darkness—is wonder at the geometrical clarity of the voluminous heads and precisely carved headdresses, each a unique specimen, and above all at the pathos and awe which is reflected in the faces. They do not gaze at the Buddha in reverence, but instead are lost in contemplation; each contributes to the living breath of the shrine. The group on the north has, on the whole, more clearly articulated figures, with the best heads shaped into spherical masses. Some headdresses in the south group also approach this clarity, sharing with the others the uniqueness of classic grandeur. Indeed they mirror that state of mind which the worshiper achieves when he is in contact with the Buddha. The kneeling position is even today practiced in worship.

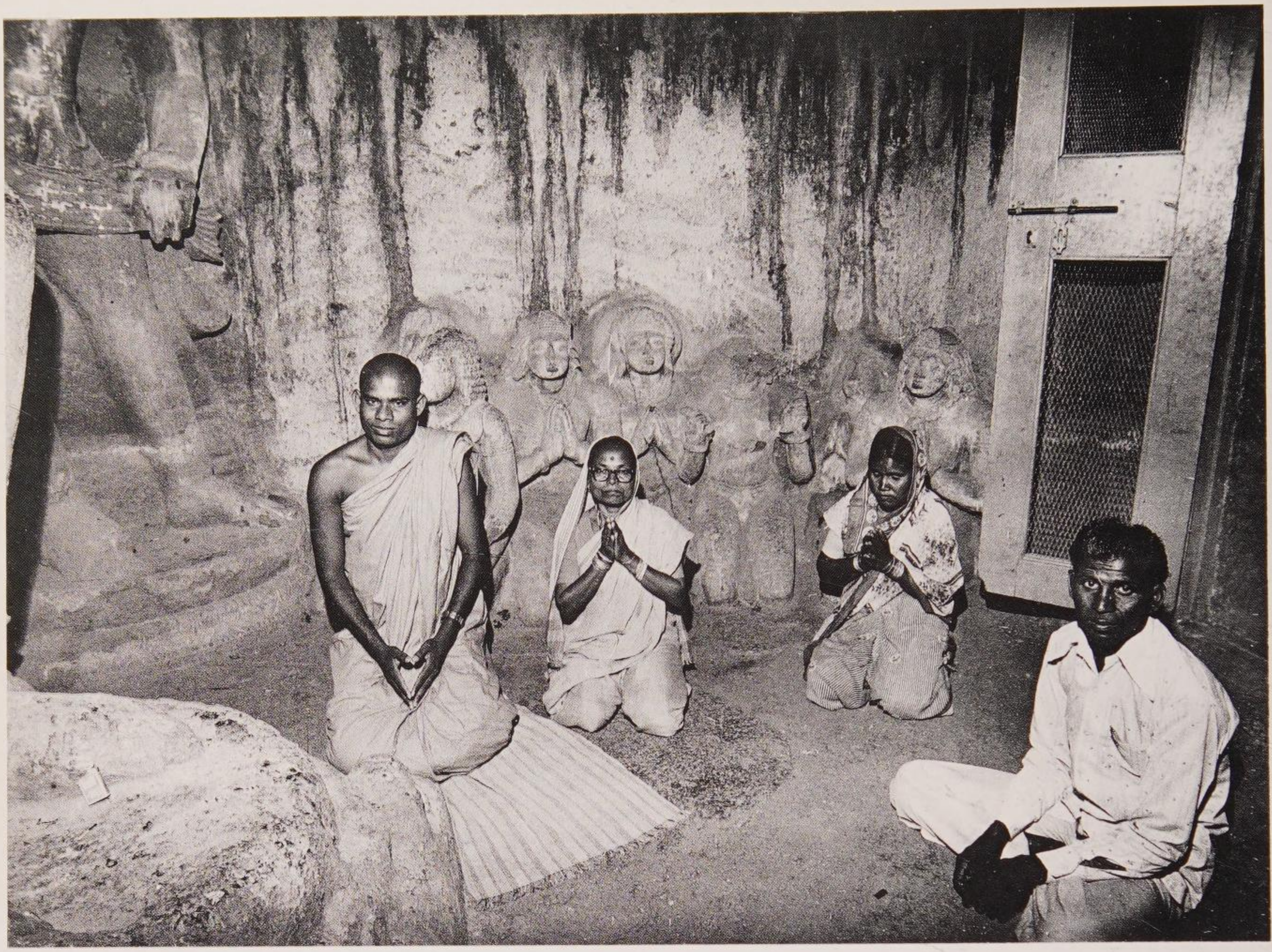
The groups were executed by sophisticated artists, heirs to the long tradition which had nourished the art of the Ajanta painters and the individual works of earlier sculpture. Only a deep involvement on a religious level could have inspired the exacting work of carving masterpieces out of the darkness of the mountainface.

Less attention has been paid to the flying figures in the upper corners of the shrine. They have already lost the three-dimensionality of the earlier ones at Ajanta and in Caves 5 and 7 here.

In defiance of the squareness of the shrine, two ten-foot *bodhisattvas* stand nestled in the corners, with pacific expressions echoing the meditative mood of the worshipers.

> *Maitreya, the Buddha to come, stands to the right of the Buddha, bearing a small figure of Amitabha on his crown. He is represented as the personified* dharma *of the* Trisharana. *And standing to the left of the Buddha is Avalokiteshvara, the compassionate* bodhisattva, *bearing the* stupa *or* chaitya *on his headdress. This later became a distinctive feature of the iconography of Maitreya, the personified* sangha *of the* Trisharana.

Cave 3 :
The door leading to the shrine decorated with loving couples and serpent princes as doorkeepers. The Buddha seated in the shrine



Cave 3 : Shrine
Worshipers in the shrine. The kneeling position of the attendant deities is practiced in worship even today

Cave 3 : Shrine
To the right of Buddha : Maitreya, Buddha to come;
bearing a small figure of Amitabha in his crown,
representing the dharma *in the* Trisharana

Cave 3 : Shrine, south wall
The attendant deities who came to pay homage to the Trisharana :
Buddha; dharma *(Maitreya) and* sangha *(Avalokiteshvara)*

Cave 3 : Shrine, north wall
The second group of attendant deities

Cave 3 : Shrine, south wall
A male attendant deity

< *Cave 3 : Shrine, south wall*
A female attendant deity

Cave 3 : Shrine, south wall
Attendant deities

< *Cave 3 : Shrine, south wall*
A male attendant deity

Cave 3 : Shrine, north wall :
Attendant deities

Cave 3 : Shrine, north wall
An attendant deity

Cave 3 : Shrine, north wall
An attendant deity

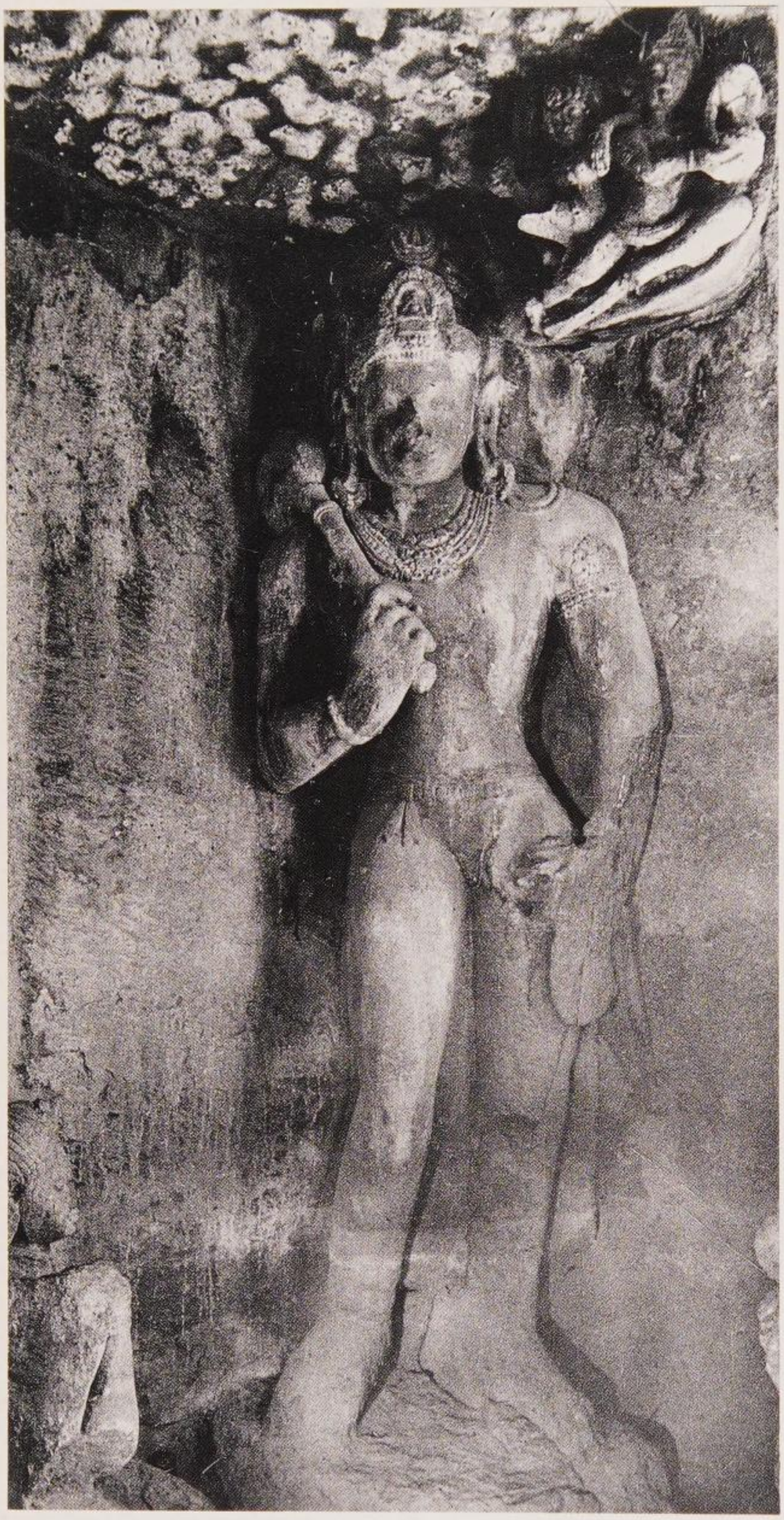
Cave 3 : Shrine, north wall
An attendant deity

Cave 3 : Shrine, north wall
Three attendant deities : each figure is placed along a different level of depth vis-a-vis the wall. The heads are juxtaposed in space, receding to the background in positions which are imaginative and new to the history of art

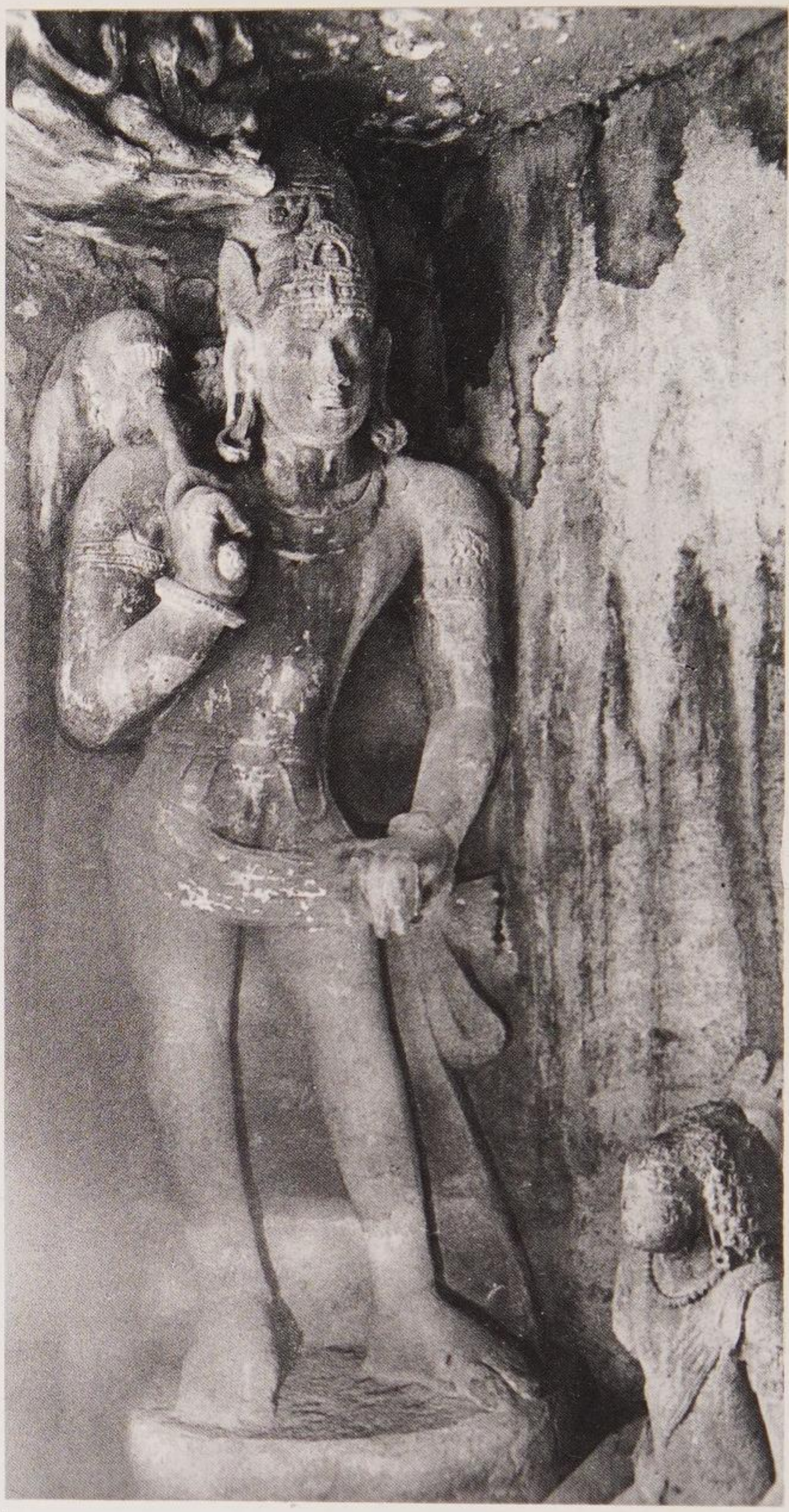
Cave 3 : Shrine, north wall
An attendant deity

Cave 3 : Shrine, north wall
Attendant deities

Cave 3 : Shrine, south wall
An attendant deity



a



b

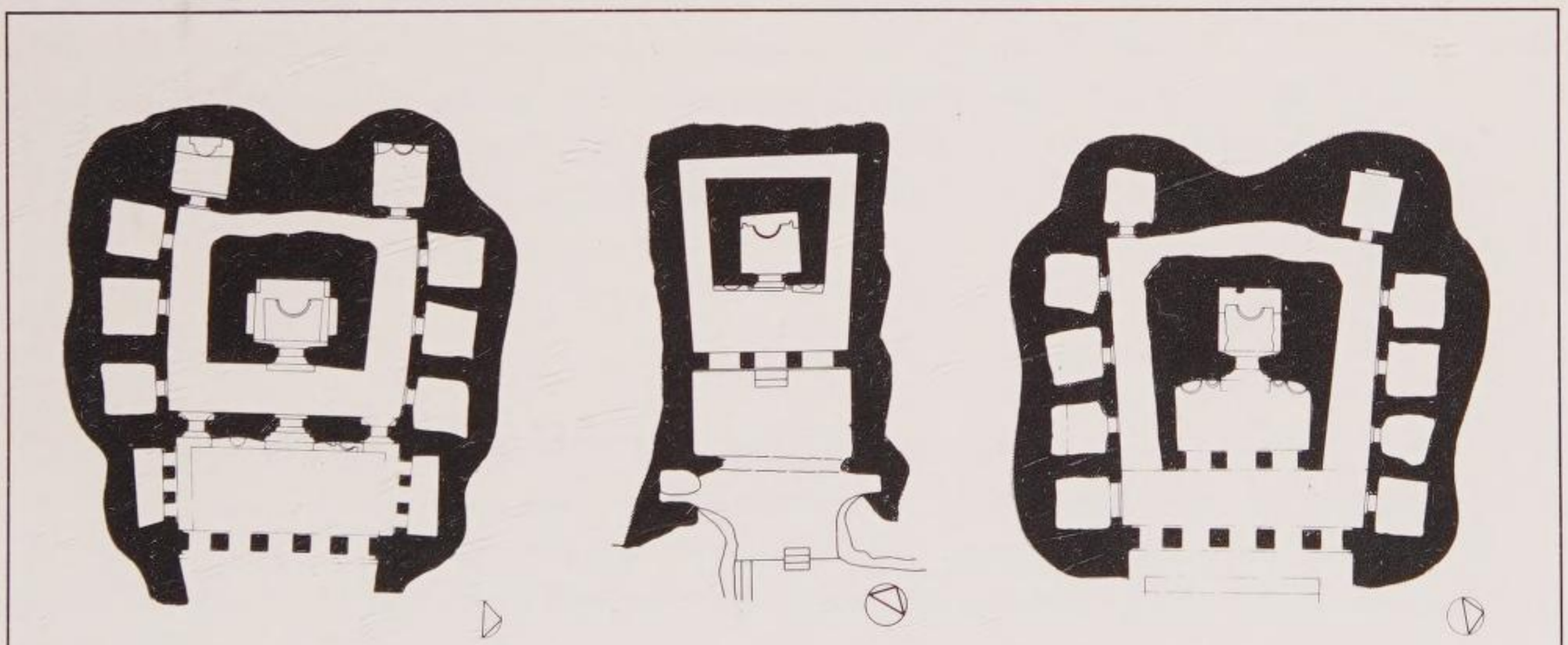
a *Cave 3 : Shrine : to the right of the Buddha*
Maitreya, the Buddha to come, bearing a small figure of Amitabha on his crown, representing the dharma *in the* Trisharana

b *Cave 3 : Shrine : to the left of the Buddha*
Avalokiteshvara, the compassionate bodhisattva *bearing the* stupa *or* chaitya *in his headdress; representing the* sangha *in the* Trisharana

Caves 7, 6 and 2 : Introduction

Because of their structural similarity, Caves 7, 6 and 2 should be examined as a unit, and in that chronological order, although each cave calls for individual attention, since unique features distinguish one from the other. The basic groundplan of all three shows a circumambulatory path *(pradakshinapatha)* around a square shrine housing the Buddha who sits on an elaborate lion throne *(simhasana),* in *pralambapadasana,* with hands in *dharmachakrapravartana mudra.* In Caves 2 and 7 he is accompanied by small seated Buddhas, representing (in Cave 7) three phases of Buddhist transformation *(tri-kaya).* Shared by all three caves are the slightly tapering columns with square bases and lotus and half-lotus medallions and large panels in which *bodhisattvas* guard the Buddha in the shrine. Movement towards the Buddha through ascending rectangular areas is part of the plan of each as well.

There are also major similarities in the iconography and themes of the minor sculptures and in the style, if not in the excellence of execution. Within the shrine, Cave 6 has an additional pair of *bodhisattvas* and all have flying figures. Caves 7 and 6 have cells for living while Cave 2 has none.



Cave 7 *Cave 2* *Cave 6*

These three caves and the earlier Cave 5 seem to have been constructed in accordance with instructions in the *tantras* concerning the ritual of circumambulation. The freestanding *stupa,* later installed in the *chaitya* halls, had been the object of worship, as the circumambulated symbol of Buddhahood, and probably the ancestors themselves to whom the earlier tumuli were dedicated had in prehistoric times been accorded this rite of devotion, which is as ancient as time and as contemporary as today. In many

parts of India circumambulation of sacred trees as a preferred mode of worship can be observed to take place on various festivals, and inside the Hindu temples the pathway is still very much in use.

The profuse instructions found in the *tantras* concerning procedures connected with the rite of circumambulation would seem to indicate that by the 4th century A.D., it held a most sacred place in the hierarchy of Brahmanical and Buddhist observances. Strict instructions concerning offerings of fruit and incense, the number of rounds, the kind of clothing and the *mantras* abound in the *tantras.*

This concentrated focus on circumambulation at the place of pilgrimage may very well account for the construction in the 5th and 6th centuries of the Hindu and Buddhist square and rectangular monuments where the shrine is separated from the back wall and is sometimes centered as at Jogeswari, Elephanta's east-wing shrine, Ajanta's (lower) Cave 6 and Cave 16, Badami's small ruined temple and numerous caves at Ellora.

The rite of circumambulation was designed for the disciple or pilgrim to identify his mystic individual Self with the concept of Buddhahood. The physical experience of walking around the shrine and uttering *mantras* aids in the process. The devotee is in a constant quest to transform himself and to ascend from the temporal to the spiritual sphere. By means of this ritual, and because he has entered into the sacred environment where the Buddha is, he is involved in a process which will assist in his desire to annihilate the profane personality.

Cave 7

Indian art and architecture is to be understood as a multiple interplay of diverse volumes with the surrounding and penetrating space. These volumes cannot be contained or firmly enclosed within ordered boundaries. A ceaseless visual journey directs attention to aggregates of details of elements in the *mandapa* and panels, an interconnected continuum of form and space. The rhythms of dark and light, of alternating voids and masses, in a state of reciprocal influence, are experienced to be always mobile and combining. Volume and space, geometric and organic forms, flat surfaces and circumscribed space, order and activity, shadows and light and all the gradients in between, in fact, an orchestration of extreme opposites and the intermediary features is the nature of the experience. Cave 7, reflecting these conditions, is one of India's finest monuments.

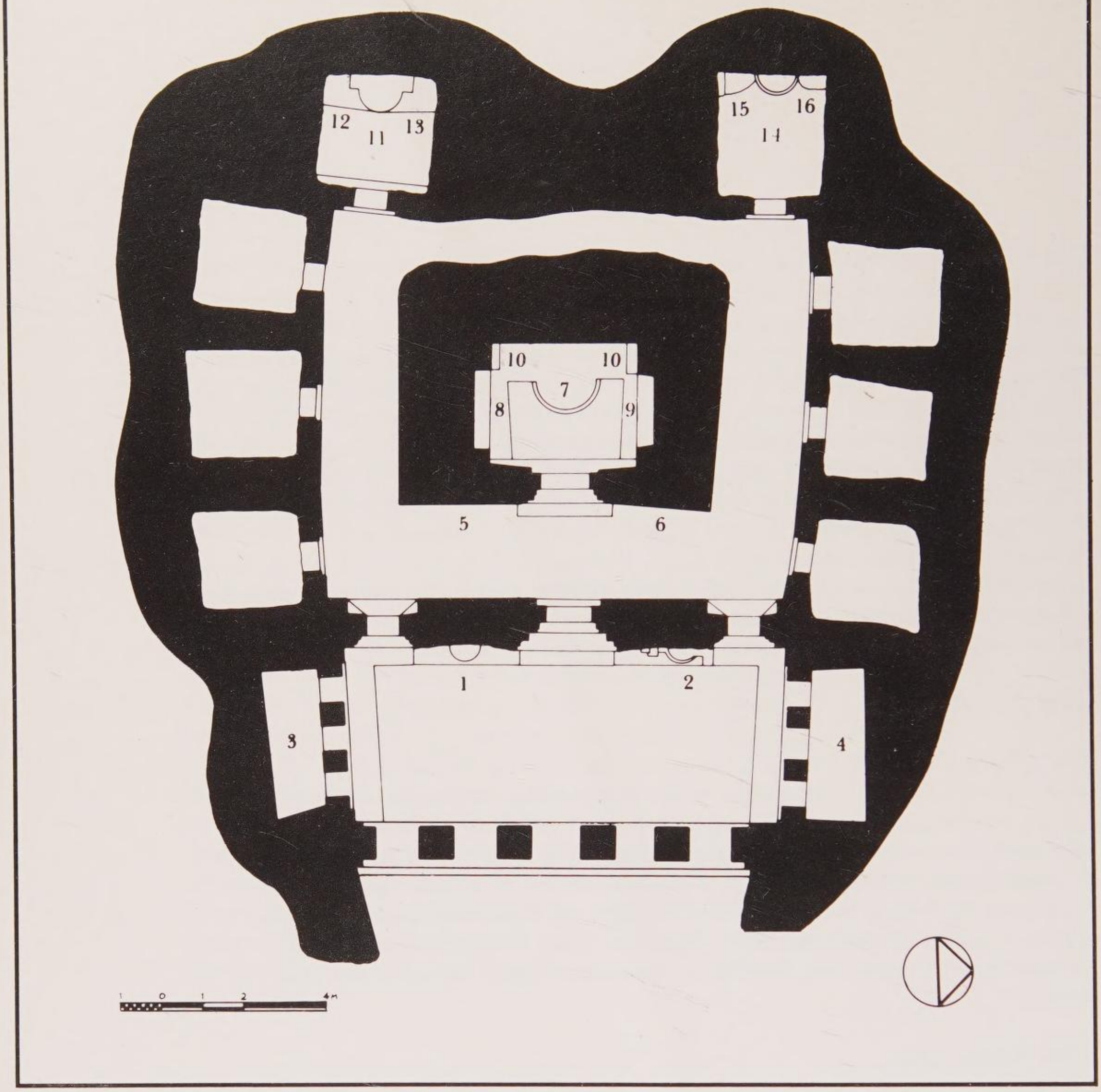
The Columns

The columns are at the entrance between the external world of light and landscape and the first transition stage, the rectangular hall *(mandapa)*. Four square tapering columns—chaste, broad, solid and compact blocks—are relieved from their squareness only by a short, ribbed, round neck. They are decorated with low relief lotus roundels enclosing *maithuna* figures above which are half-lotus roundels with animals and foliated designs and below with a separate row of rosettes or elephants. The columns are arranged in a series of repetitive accents, adding to the momentum. All is a continuum of form.

The Mandapa

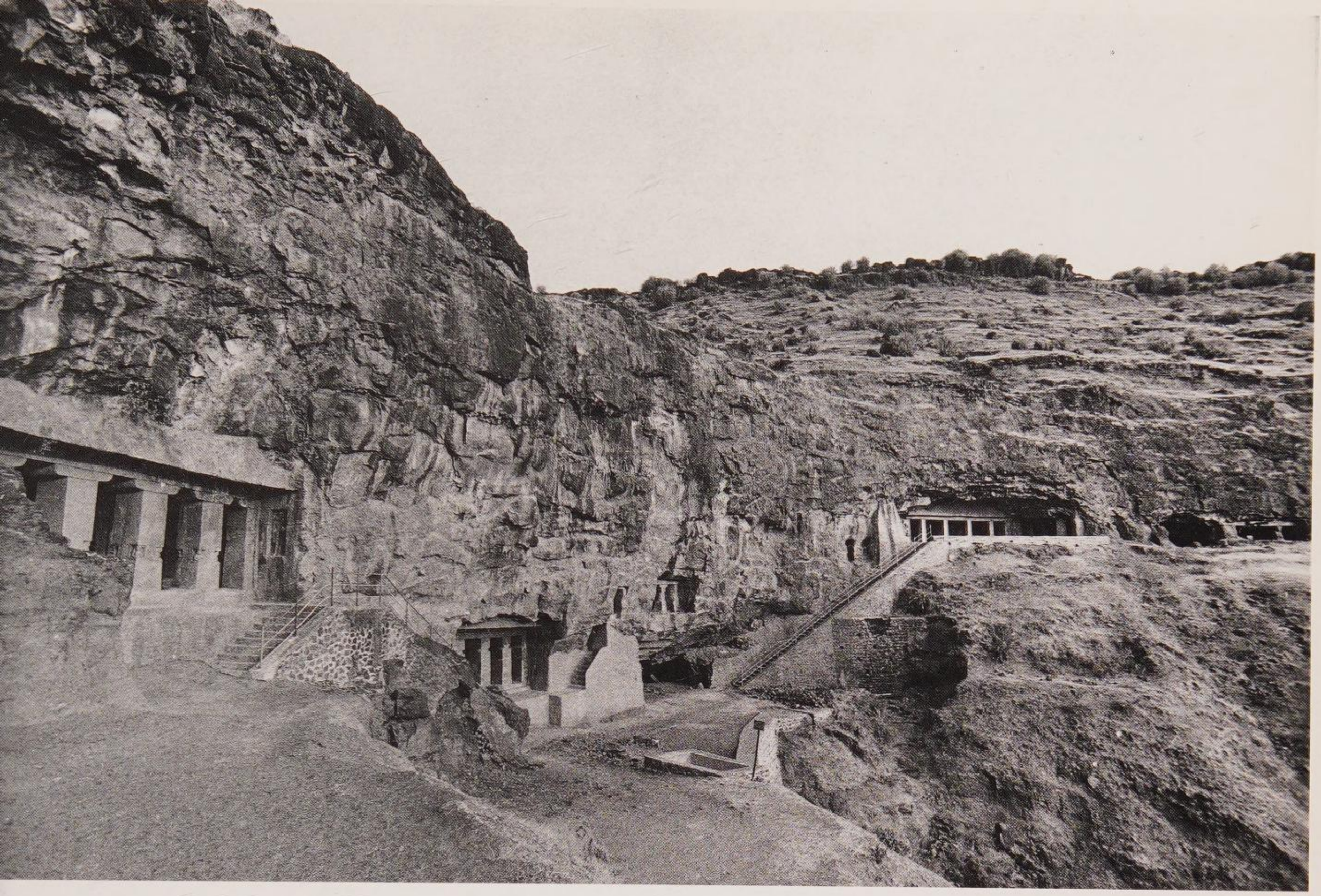
Passage into the *mandapa* over the threshold reveals a view crowded with sculptures but unified by space. The *mandapa* is the first stage in the gradual transition from the temporal world to spiritual involvement with the Buddha, from the external world to the interior of the mountain symbolic of the interior of the Self.

Perceptual laws pertaining to the instinctive tendency for patterning of distinct but similar phenomena into a configurational whole are responsible for certain visual reactions. For example, in the *mandapa* three vertical dark rectangular voids at the entrance to each of the two side chambers are visually joined with the dark voids of the windows and the door in the wall, and also, from some positions, with the void of the door leading to the shrine in the *antarala*. In the same way, the volumes : the flat planes of floor and ceiling; the blocks of the



Cave 7 :

1. Ashtamahabhaya Avalokiteshvara
2. Avalokiteshvara
3. Buddha and his prajnas
4. Hariti and Jambhala
5. Tara panel
6. Tara panel
7. Buddha
8. Dancing Tara
9. Avalokiteshvara and Tara
10. Tri-kaya
11. Buddha
12. Avalokiteshvara
13. Avalokiteshvara
14. Buddha
15. Avalokiteshvara
16. Avalokiteshvara



The northern group of caves : Caves 6 to 9.

Cave 7 :
The facade with columns viewed from the outside

Cave 7 :
The columns of the mandapa, *viewed from the interior*

Cave 7 : Mandapa :
A partial view : facing north

columns; or the sculptures are perceived to be aggregates—that is, the stone shapes which bear similarity to each other are seen not as individual, separate elements but are organized into coordinate groupings. These perceptual tendencies occur automatically when serious attention is directed to the cave.

The Coalescent Form Life

The panel on the viewer's left as he faces the central doorway of the *mandapa* is:

Ashtamahabhaya form of Avalokiteshvara

The panel on the viewer's right is :

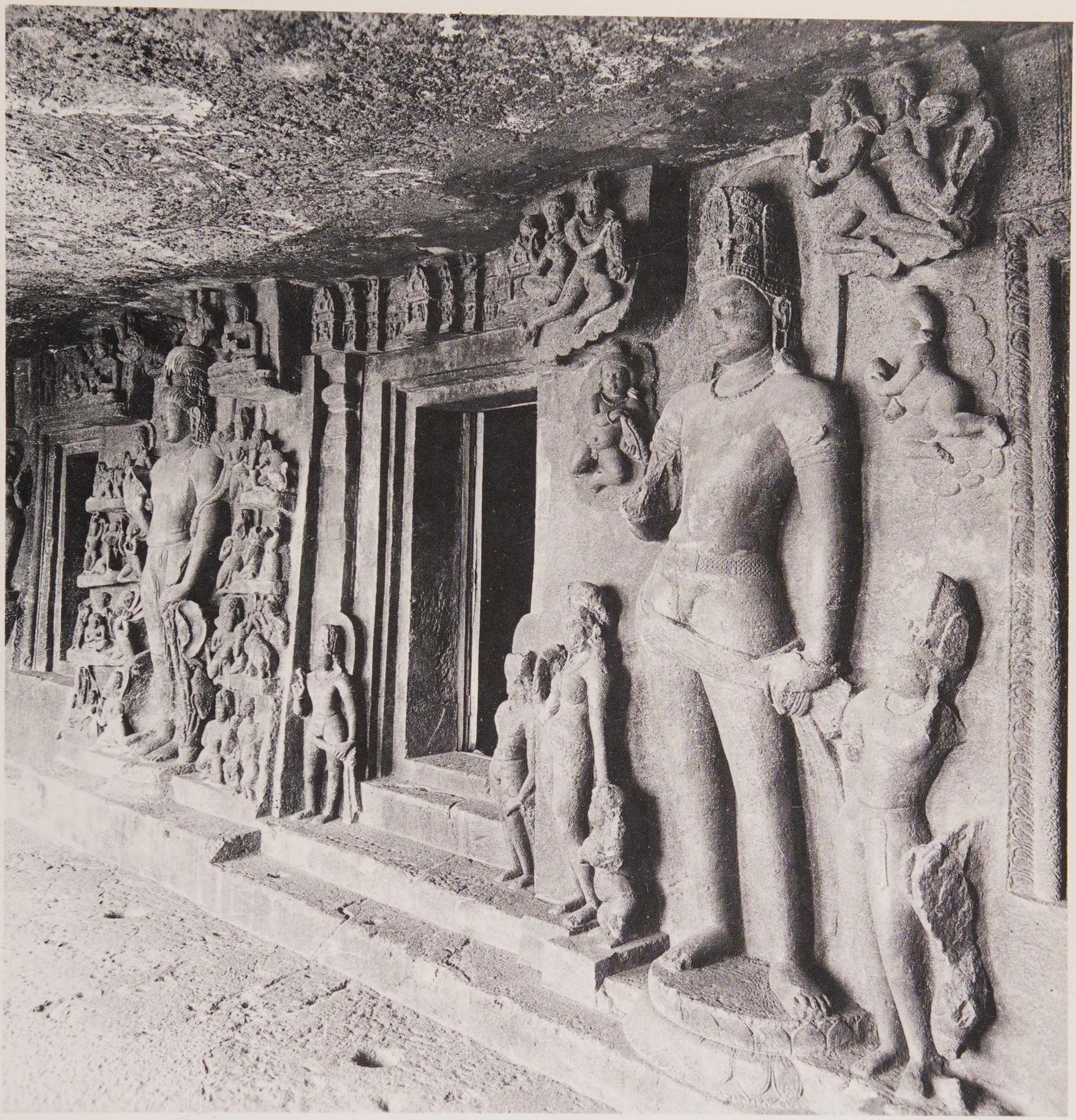
Avalokiteshvara

An example of how the elements within a particular configuration may be displaced from their original position and how they form themselves into a new set of relationships may be observed at the tops and bottoms of these panels and of the intervening door. Two Buddhas seated against a rectangular background (Adi-Buddhas) and two worshipers carrying garlands in the panel to the viewer's left may be observed in relation to the miniature shrines above the door. A horizontal line is formed which continues on to the *vidyadharas* hovering over the Avalokiteshvara on the viewer's right. Together these elements assume an appearance of a horizontal row of alternating volumes and spaces placed at various levels of depth. The panels, no longer perceived as separate entities, have revealed themselves in actuality to be merged with the adjacent forms which are beyond the particular frame of each. This merging which often creates an ambivalent situation is in the nature of Indian art and is seen here to best advantage.

A further example of the coalescent form life here can be observed in the *naga* figures and Avalokiteshvara's female attendant, Tara : they are merged compositionally. The steps have been extended by the artist intentionally on one side only; this disrupts the harmony and adds to the syncopation.
It is worthwhile to examine the carving of the small details of the *mandapa* columns, to compare them to the carvings in Cave 3. The artist is interested in instilling each centimetre of stone with life force; he concentrates on creating nuanced differentiation in the concave and convex forms, to accentuate the effects of light and shadow. Linear treatment is firm and strong, and the figures display vitality. This subtle modelling will be lost in many of the later carvings on the columns of Caves 6 and 2, and in Cave 3 there are variations, as explained above.

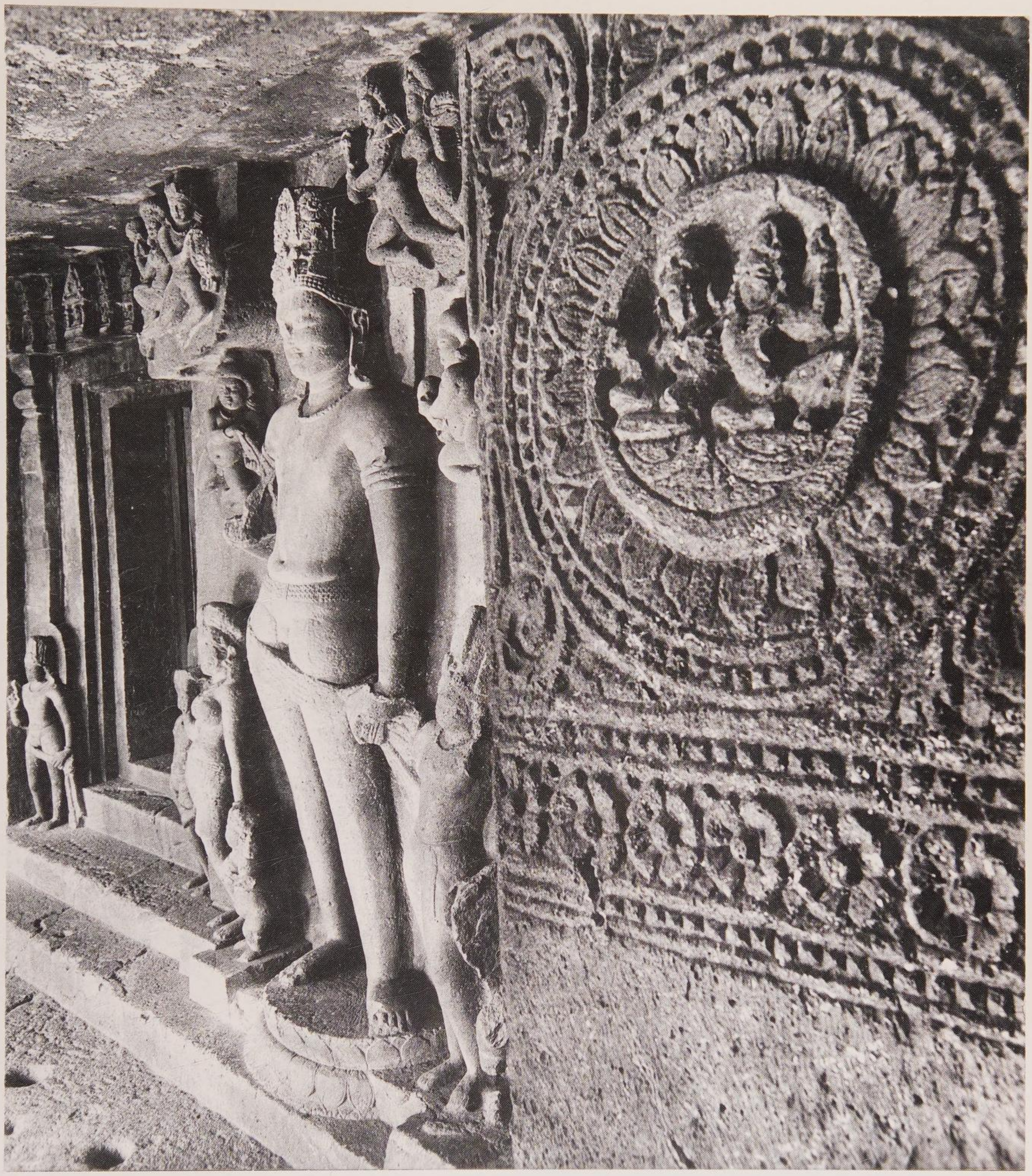
Between the two panels, the doorway has recessed, flat, unadorned jambs. Two *naga* figures stand as guardians on the stairs; their backs and surrounding

Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall*
Bodhisattva *panels : Ashtamahabhaya Avalokiteshvara and Avalokiteshvara, view from the south chamber*



Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall*
Bodhisattva *panels : Avalokiteshvara and Ashtamahabhaya*
Avalokiteshvara; view from the north chamber

Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall*
Detail : Ashtamahabhaya Avalokiteshvara, view from the south chamber



Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall,*
Detail : Avalokiteshvara with a detail of the pilaster showing a couple in dalliance in a roundel and a row of rosettes; view from the north chamber

halos *(prabhamandalas)* are set against the slim, unadorned pilasters. These pilasters and the upper frame of the door support a lintel composed of replicas of miniature structural shrines, placed in an ordered rhythmic arrangement,—as opposed to those on the Cave 1 lintel—on four planes, which sometimes, in an optical illusion, seem to look curved. They represent a three *tala* roof with porch and columns sheltering a Buddha and standing attendants. Vertical and horizontal ambiguity also can be observed here.

On the far side of each panel, a window breaks the wall, allowing light to enter and reach the far end of the inner depths of the cave. The frames of these windows are intricately carved with animal and human figures and animal-headed human figures alternating with rosettes and abstract linear and lotus petal designs on rounded and flat jambs. Above each window is a small panel depicting Lakshmi, goddess of fortune, with her attendants, being lustrated by elephants *(abhisheka)*. Here is the original design, pre-Buddhist in conception, illustrating the birth of the goddess who arose out of the churned, milky waters. Extant stone examples from Sanci and Bharhut instruct that she was then a popular object of worship and probably had been for centuries before. As we have seen, *The Great Miracle at Shravasti* image was derived from this composition. At the corners of the *mandapa* two lovely female figures (Sitatara) accentuate the developing interest in worship of the female.

Form, volume and space interact, and light entering at different times of the day and the year compounds the already complicated interrelationships. It shifts from moment to moment, casting shadows, emphasizing form and highlighting what may have been hidden in a panorama of shifting visual experiences. There is either total contrast of light and dark, intermediate gradations, or at the end of the day, even a complete merging of all form into a unified whole. The light is direct and reflected. But in order to enjoy all the shifting views and the numerous possibilities of combinations, the viewer must himself move around.

The *mandapa* is flanked by two narrow, rectangular side chambers :

The North Chamber

The panel on the back wall representing the ultimate achievement of classic art shows erect three-dimensional figures—they are flat at the back—in interaction. They represent :

Hariti and Jambhala (or Pancika) with chowri-bearer.

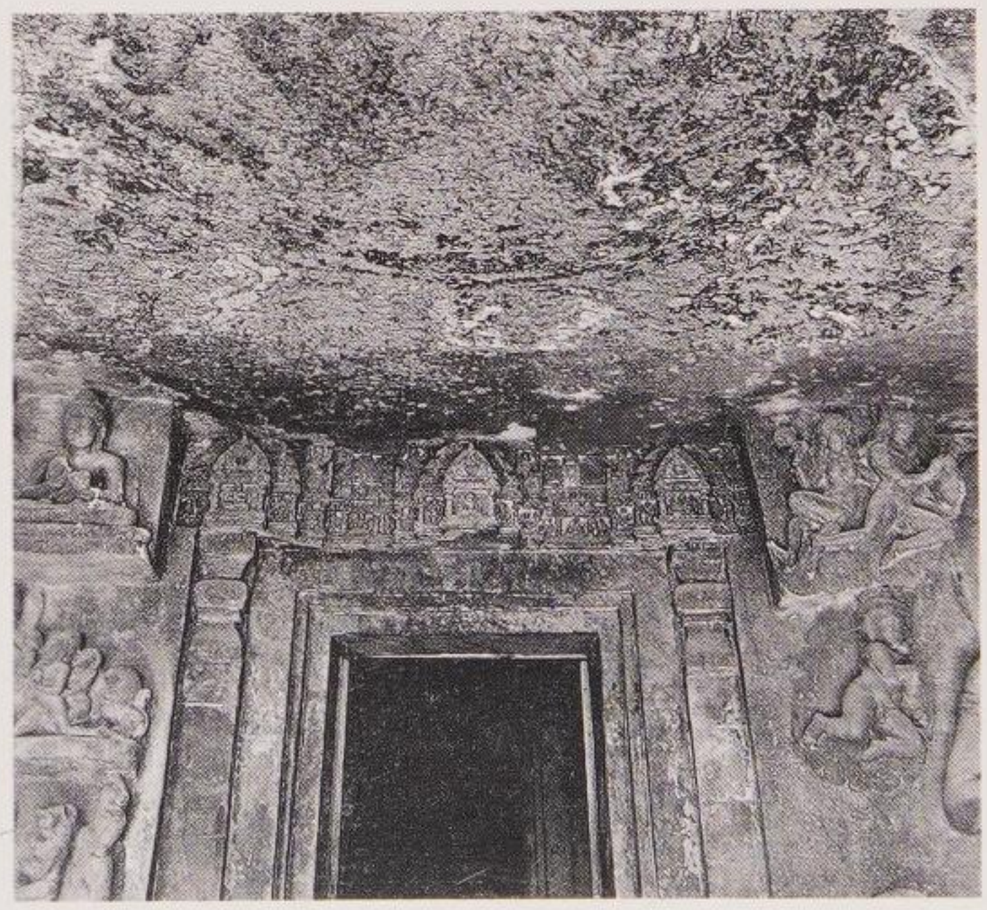
a

b

a *Cave 7 :* Mandapa
Sitatara, a pilaster and a column of the north chamber

b *Cave 7 :* Mandapa
Sitatara with Lakshmi Abhishekha surmounting the north window

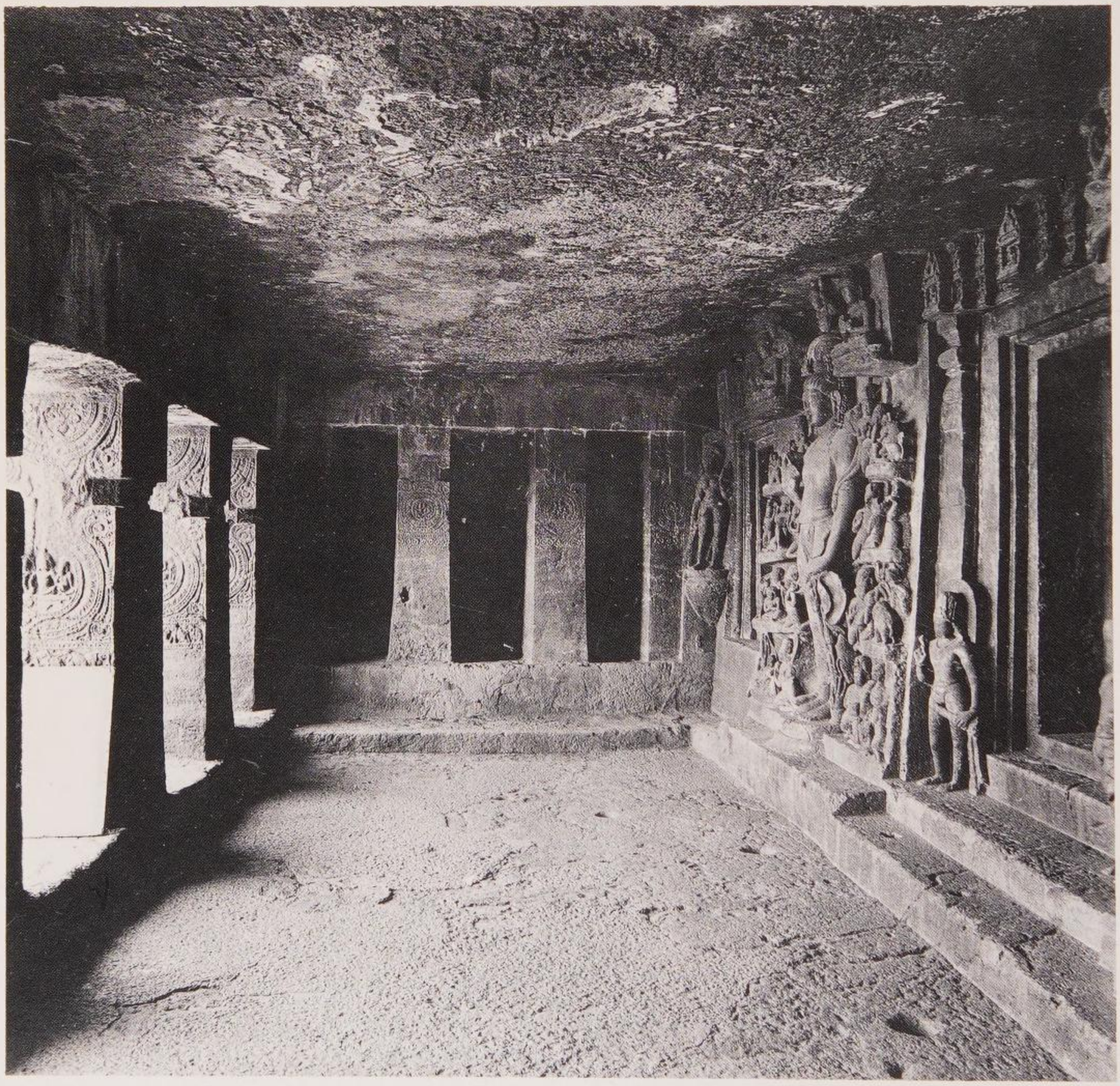
c *Cave 7 :* Mandapa
The miniature shrine replicas above the door leading to the vestibule



c

Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall; a panel above the north and south windows*
Lakshmi Abhishekha : the goddess Lakshmi being lustrated by elephants;

Cave 7 : Mandapa
A partial view of the Mandapa *facing south*



Cave 7 : North chamber, panel
Jambhala (or Pancika), Hariti and two chowri *bearers*

Cave 7 : North chamber, panel
the child on Hariti's knee

Cave 7 : North chamber, panel
Detail : Hariti with child

Hariti was originally a deity who had the power of harming children, but after her conversion to Buddhism, she used her power for good. Jambhala (or Pancika), Buddhist heir of Kubera, the god of fortune, is usually seen with Hariti. The figure of Hariti and child is a unique stylistic adventure into the curvacious and amply conceived, voluptuous feminine figure. Mass is contained, bursting from within. The artist was tenderly in love with soft and full convexities, with flowing outline, the mass of expanding hair freely falling, rotundity and fleshiness. The child's free-standing figure, enclosed by Hariti's arm, is perpendicular to the wall. There is pleasure in the depiction of minute details : for example, Hariti's belly is pressed by the girdle underneath; or the position of her ankle and foot is dissonant. Her wasp waist links her figure to the figures of the Taras in the *antarala.*

Jambhala (or Pancika) too sits fat, fleshy and relaxed, happy in this material existence and the enjoyment of wealth. This chamber still represents externals. As he sits, he leans with an arm gracefully poised on a rounded, bulbous pillow. Stream-like, the parts flow, with no sharp transitions or angularities. His feet are charmingly placed in natural positions, the details of the modelling of the ball of his turned foot are more representational than any in Indian sculpture. The artist who delighted in naturalistic emphasis was well aware that this panel was at the periphery of the *mandala,* which has as its centre the abstract figure of the Buddha, which is carved without surface details. Two female fan *(chowri)* bearers in sensuous stances, with intricate headdresses, flank Hariti and Jambhala. Cupid-like three-dimensional worshipers on billowy clouds float above in the two corners. They too remind one of the Ajanta Cave 1 flying figures. The background is uncluttered, except for the halos *(prabhamandalas).*

The South Chamber

Six small, standing, lotus-bearing female figures and a male on either end are carved on the back wall of the south chamber. They represent :

Buddha and his prajnas *with Avalokiteshvara*

The prominent headdresses and mobile, sensuous gestures emphasizing the feminine attributes of the *prajnas* echo the style of those in the *antarala,* although in execution they are inferior. They stand on lotus pedestals, heads surrounded by *prabhamandalas;* they have double-strand necklaces. The ancient worship of the seven mothers, *(sapta matrikas),* which had already gained popularity among the Hindus, acquires a Buddhist terminology here.

Cave 7 : North chamber
Detail : Jhambhala (or Pancika) with chowri *bearer*

< *Cave 7 : North chamber*
Detail : Hariti and child with chowri *bearer*

b *Avalokiteshvara* prajnas *Buddha*

a *Cave 7 : South chamber*
Head of one of the prajnas

b *Cave 7 : South chamber*
Buddha and his prajnas *with Avalokiteshvara*

c *Cave 7 : South Chamber*
The Buddha in varada mudra

Avalokiteshvara on the east holds a water bag, and his right hand is in the gesture of protection *(abhaya mudra)*. On the west, Buddha's diaphanous robe, his elongated right arm denoting charity or gift of boons *(varada mudra)* and his uplifted left arm holding the robe are carved in popular classic position. The figure is important to observe, both for its stylistic integrity and its resemblance to similar sculptures of Buddha at Bagh, Kanheri and Ajanta, for the purpose of dating the cave.

All linear outlines within the panel are synchronized, and a circulating external movement links elements in the group.

The Bodhisattvas

All hail! great compassionate Padmapani Bodhisattva, Mahasattva!
From the devouring fire, merciful one, deliver us
From the sword of the enemy, merciful Lord, deliver us
From captivity and slavery merciful one deliver us
From shipwreck compassionate Lord, deliver us
From wild beasts, poisonous reptiles and enraged animals
Great compassionate Lord, deliver us
From disease and death, great compassionate Lord, deliver us
Hail, Padmapani Bodhisattva ! Hail Amitabha Buddha !

quotation in:

G. Yazdani "The Rock Hewn Temples of Aurangabad"
Indian Art and Letters, Vol. XI, No. 1, 1937

If chronological order has been followed in the approach the *bodhisattva* is encountered for the first time. He plays a dual role as object of worship in his own right, but he also acts as guardian to assist the votary in the transitions on the way towards the Buddha in the shrine. While the Buddha in the shrine is austere, removed, detached and above the *bodhisattvas* in the hierarchy, these two figures, representing different aspects of Avalokiteshvara, the compassionate *bodhisattva,* provided the worshiper with an intimate and personal relationship of identification with the deity symbolized by an easily reachable icon.

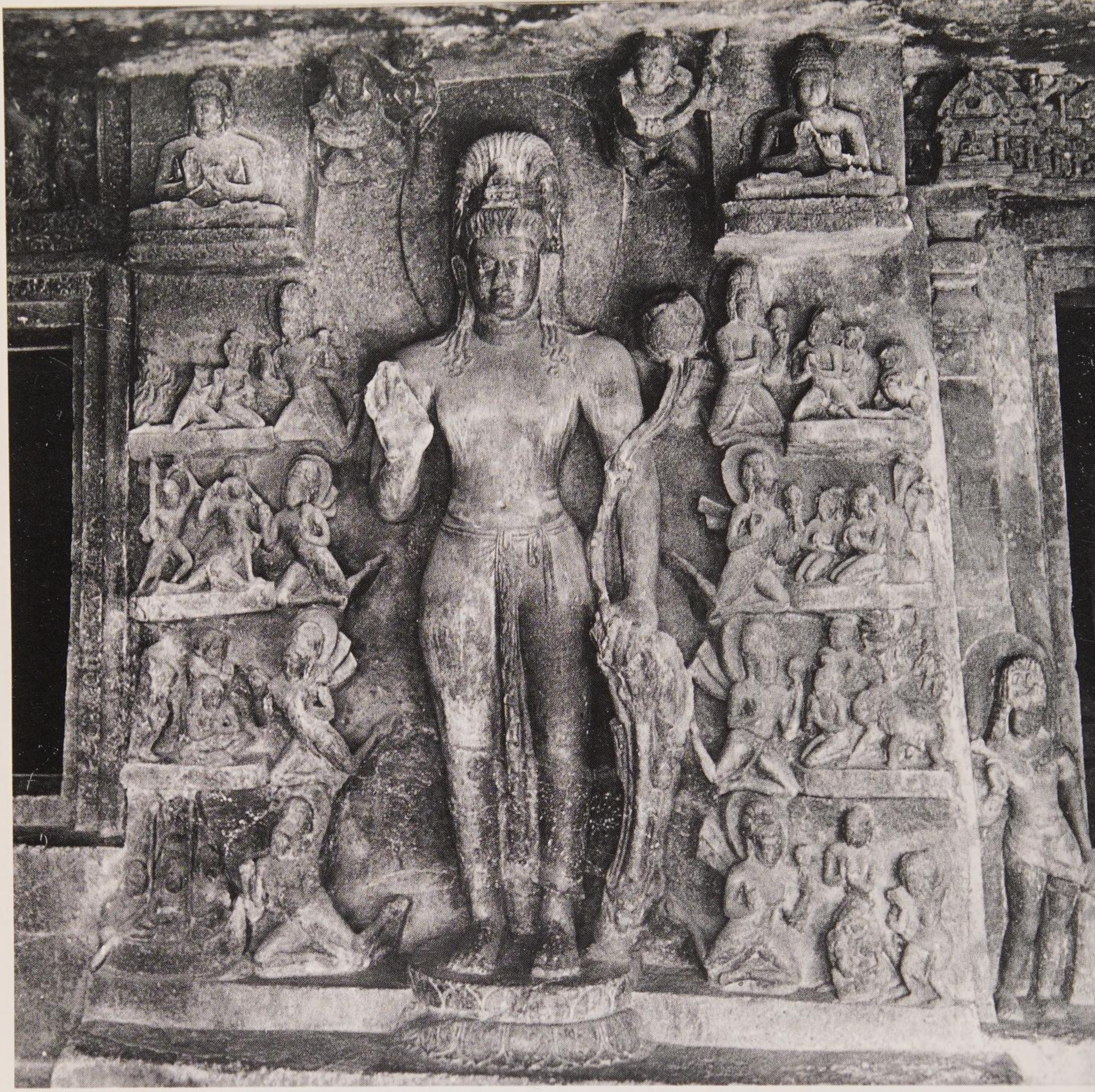
One of India's major works of sculpture, the panel depicting the Ashtamahabhaya form of Avalokiteshvara, or the *Eight Great Perils of Temporal Existence,* is a reflection of vital energy and its containment in the still solitude within the psyche, when the body has been disciplined and the

mind conquered. It reflects and reveals the strength and stability resulting from inward reflection and the compassion and pathos which Avalokiteshvara came to signify to millions of devotees who had turned to the *bodhisattva* as saviour at this time

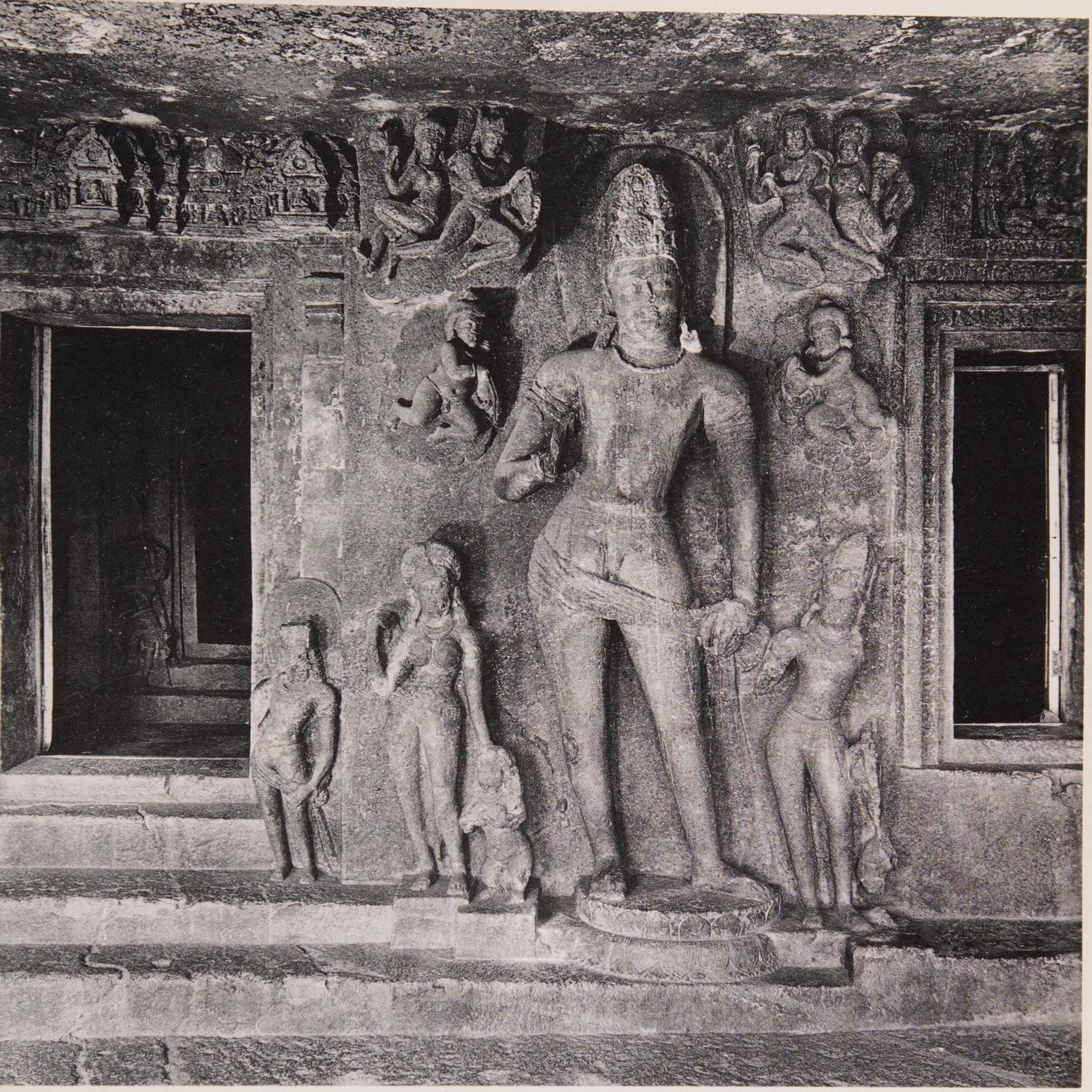
When studied carefully, the panel may be observed in a number of ways—none being dominant—depending on which arrangement the viewer chooses to concentrate upon. One tendency is to see each section of the narrative—the arrangement of the eight horizontal small panels—as combined with the eight floating or flying figures with halos and wings; but the ambivalent nature of the panel soon disrupts this single view. A focus on Avalokiteshvara who stands as straight as *axis mundi,* the vertical world pillar, with an upright stance emphasizing the eternal, will reveal the flying figures to be representations of his presence. Now they definitely emanate out of the central stalk, radiating *towards* the small side panels. Again, if these emanations are observed to be vertical, they form a frame for the *bodhisattva.* They thus contain the power within the figure of Avalokiteshvara, but at the same time, they also direct attention outward. Centrifugal and centripedal forces are at work. Compression and expansion are the result. A subtle artist understood precisely how to arrange the volumes in space in order to effect this shifting emphasis. The presentation of ambivalent views is deliberate in a symbolic plastic analogy with the philosophy of the interdependency and mobility of all things. The very subtle depiction of the *Perils of Life* being eased by the energies emanating out of, and obviously still connected with, the main figure can be compared in composition and inflorescent expansion of forms from a central stalk with the great 5th century statue of Shiva with the musical deities from Parel, the plaster cast of which is in the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay.

Although rigidly classified and placed in specific areas of the panel, the multiple forms nevertheless are in interaction at all times; there is a ceaseless flow of energy to, from and among the multiplicities, which is not even confined to the particular panel. It is worthwhile to stop and comprehend this phenomenon here, as it is one of the most fundamental characteristics of many of the great stone panels in India. Their constituent elements are in dynamic interaction and are never static, no matter how classic and disciplined they may appear to be at first. The phenomenal life and the inward visions of the *bodhisattvas* are inseparably merged, reflecting Indian conceptions.

The wings and the bent flying legs of the figures emanating from the *bodhisattvas;* the organic forms of the bulbous lotus and stalk, surging upward and out from the lotus under the feet of Avalokiteshvara; and the agitation



Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall, south of doorway*
The Ashtamahabhaya form of Avalokiteshvara, representing the bodhisattva *as the saviour from the Eight Great Perils of Existence*



Cave 7 : Maṇḍapa *wall, north of doorway*
Avalokiteshvara in the centre flanked by Tara and Sudhanakumara on his right and Khasarpana Lokeshvara on his left

Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall*

The Eight Great Perils of Existence
in the Ashtamahabhaya Avalōkiteshvara panel

fire

slavery

illness or robbery

shipwreck

lions and wild animals

snakes

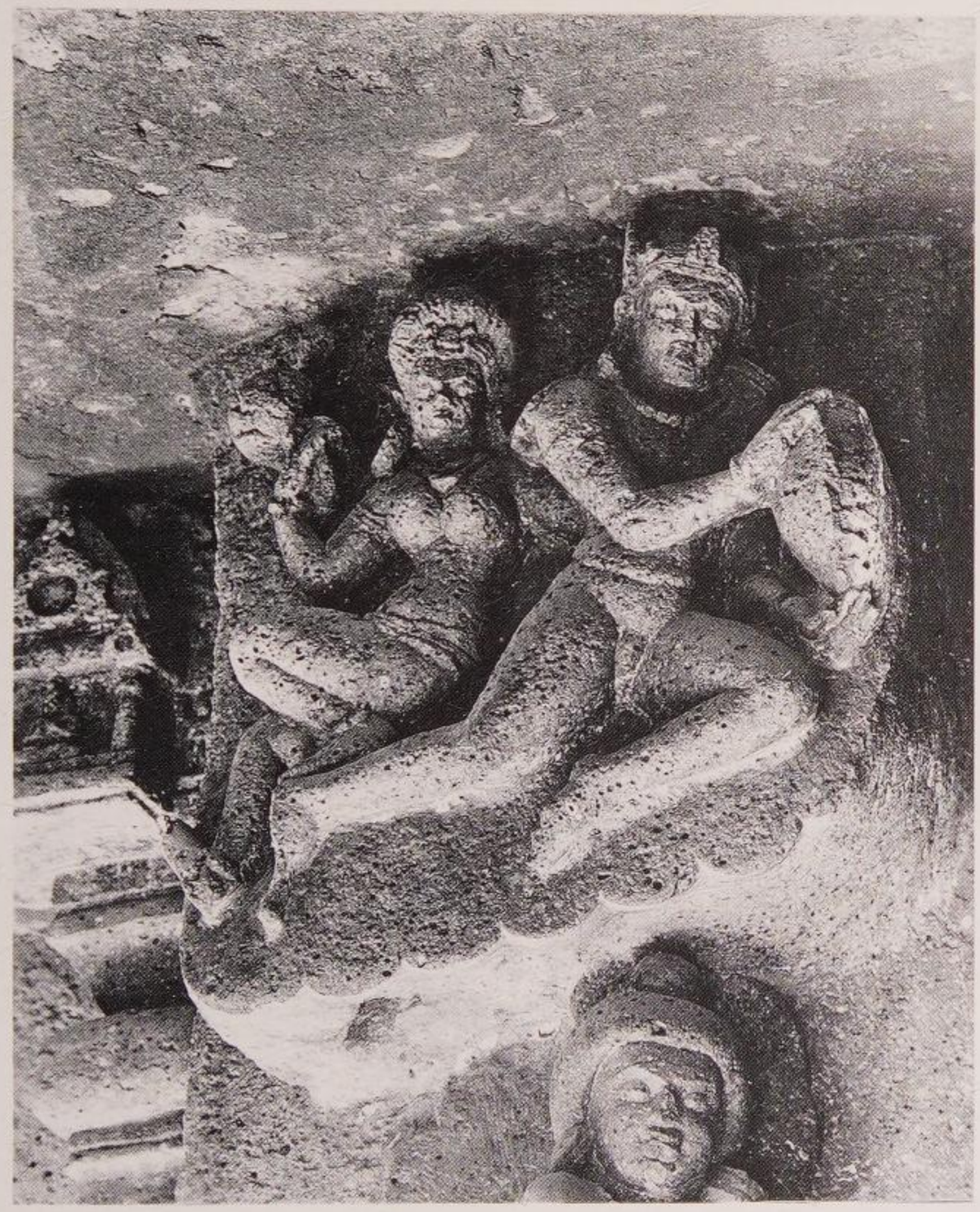
ferocious elephants

death in the guise of an old woman (or the pains of difficult childbirth)

Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall*
Detail of Ashtamahabhaya Avalokiteshvara panel : his head and headdress in profile

Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall*
Detail of Ashtamahabhaya Avalokiteshvara panel : the figure of Avalokiteshvara

Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall*
Detail of the Ashtamahabhaya Avalokiteshvara panel : Adi-Buddha in padmasana *and* dharmachakrapravartana mudra *set against a rectangular, raised block with a garland-bearing worshiper*



Cave 7 : Mandapa *wall*
Details of Avalokiteshvara panel : apsara, gandharva *and worshiper approaching the* bodhisattva

within each of the eight depictions of the *Perils of Life* contrasts markedly with the static, quiescent and immutable verticality of the major figure and the Adi-Buddhas seated in *padmasana* above. This triangular inner structure stabilizes the incessant surrounding agitation just as Buddha himself quiets the raging mind.

The arrangement of the panel is reminiscent of others, from Bharhut to Elephanta, where the large single figure of the deity is centred and smaller elements, because they are fragmented forms, are subsidiary. The *Perils of Life* in clockwise direction, include : shipwreck, illness or robbery, slavery, fire, lions and wild animals, snakes, ferocious elephants (war) and finally, death, in the guise of an old woman, (or difficult childbirth).

Two Adi-Buddhas are set against a rectangular, raised block :

They sit in padmasana *with hands in the*
dharmachakrapravartana mudra

Two garland-bearing worshiping cherubs hover over the scene in protective attitude. Linear, straight strands of hair are piled high and flow in curls to the shoulders of Ashtamahabhaya Avalokiteshvara; the ears have long lobes. The emblem in his headdress represents :

Dhyani Buddha Amitabha, with Buddha sitting in
padmasana *and hands in* dhyana mudra.

The modelling of the main figure is subtle, with gentle convexities. Diaphanous, clinging fabric reaching his knees meets between his legs. His left hand rests on the great stalks of lotus, his right hand may have held the rosary, as in Cave 2. While the panel is primarily carved frontally, there are three-quarter views, for example, from within the south chamber, which show the sculpture to best advantage. The headdress, the plant, the *Perils of Life,* Avalokiteshvara himself, the Adi-Buddhas and the flying figures are now seen in a new set of relationships. Indian sculpture, like all sculpture, is not intended to be seen only from the front. The participant and his choice of views determines the reality of the perceptions.

Turning to the panel north of the doorway, to the viewer's right, lotus-bearing cherubic worshipers float on clouds at the shoulder level of this, a different aspect of Avalokiteshvara. Above them are two pairs of *maithuna* couples whose heads touch the ceiling. The figure, head and left leg of Avalokiteshvara are slightly turned, his legs are separated, with the weight shifted, and his left

shoulder moves slightly forward. All this adds up to a modified dynamism in contrast to the absolute vertical severity and the stillness of the Ashtamahabhaya Avalokiteshvara. He wears a belt of wrought silver and a diagonally oriented sash incised with lines ending in a knot. The missing right hand may have held an open lotus *(padma)* as in an analogous *bodhisattva* in Cave 2, Ellora. While the figure is prominently frontal, and the wall is flat, the left leg is totally separated from the back wall, indicating a new interest in releasing the figure from the background. Freeing the background from fragmentation, permitting its space to be vacant, is also a new trend. The evenly spaced volumes surrounding Avalokiteshvara can be observed vertically on the one hand or horizontally on the other; this ambiguity creates a sense of mobility.

The emblems on the headdress of Avalokiteshvara are not absolutely distinct, but it appears that the upper one is :

Dhyani Buddha Amitabha in padmasana *and* dhyana mudra,

while beneath it is a decorative design which is part of a tripartite emblematic crown.

The young male attendant on the left of Avalokiteshvara is :

Khasarpana Lokeshvara

while the young woman and her attendant on his right are :

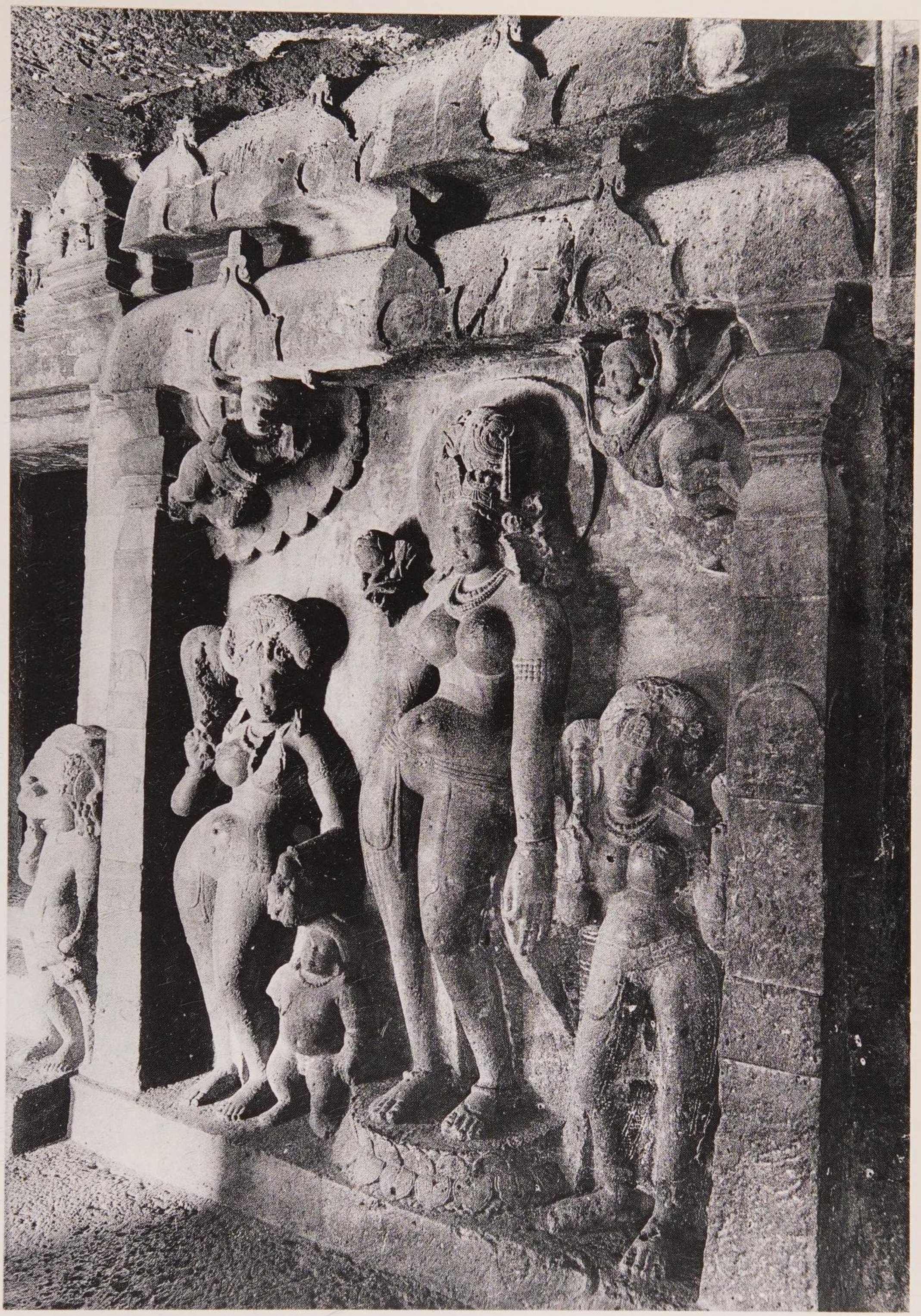
Tara and Sudhanakumara, a dwarf lady

Tara and Khasarpana Lokeshvara have knees that are bent which causes hip extensions, hinting at the poses which will be encountered in the vestibule.

The Taras.

Entrance through the door to the *antarala* is an abrupt transition, a sudden confrontation with the darkness within. Slowly the forms carved on the outer wall of the shrine emerge. Depending on where the participant stands one may be likely to see either a shadowy form of a female, a *nagaraja* or a pilaster, beckoning the worshiper to enter.

Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, south
Tara and attendants standing in a shrine



Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, north
Tara and attendants standing in a shrine

Vajrasphota *Yaksha Manibhadra* *Tara* *Ekajata* *Vajraghanta*

Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, south
Tara and attendants, from the viewer's left to right : Vajrasphota, Yaksha Manibhadra, Tara, Ekajata and Vajraghanta

Vajrankushi *Tara* *Vajrapashi*

Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, north
Tara and attendants, from the viewer's left to right :

Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, south
Detail : Vajrasphota, a gate-keeper goddess

Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, south
Tara

Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, south
Vajraghanta, a gate-keeper goddess

Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, north
Vajrankushi, a gate-keeper goddess

Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, north
Tara

Cave 7 : Vestibule panel, north
Vajrapashi, a gate-keeper goddess

On either side of the door there are two large rectangular panels, each with a near life size Tara figure with her retinue standing within a South Indian shrine. It has double stories *(talas)* and *chaitya* designs enclosing miniature seated Buddhas. Flying in at the corners, horizontally oriented cherubic worshipers bring wreaths. The voids of the *pradakshinapatha* and doorway together with the tableaux are united in a continuous life of form.

The south panel represents, in successive order from the viewer's left to right :

Vajrasphota	*gate-keeper goddess*
Yaksha Manibhadra	*attendant yaksha*
Tara	*deified female principle*
Ekajata	*attendant deity*
Vajraghanta	*gate-keeper goddess*

The north panel represents, in successive order from the viewer's left to right :

Vajrankushi	*gate-keeper goddess*
Sudhanakumara	*dwarfish figure*
Tara	*deified female principle*
Vajrapashi	*gate-keeper goddess*

In addition to the panels, worth noticing in the vestibule are the four framed Adi-Buddhas surmounting the *pradakshinapatha* aisles in the corners, the totally plain flat recessed door jambs with pilasters and the remnants of the paint, which may or may not be contemporary with the sculptures.

The Tara panels should be conceived of as the second stage in an inward progression towards the Buddha in the shrine. They are conceptually connected with the *bodhisattvas* of the *mandapa.* But now it is six females as opposed to the males on the outside who guard the entrances. They represent the ultimate embodiment of sybaritic sensuality, combined with sweetness and quiet dignity, expressed by the undulation of curving outlines which circumscribe unusually accentuated rotundities. Ripe and voluptuous, silently provocative, their exaggerated breasts, hips and thighs burst with concupiscent fullness, emphasizing the fecund nature of the creating female, ready and willingly disposed. Their mood is of langorous dalliance, yet they are here to instil the force and power of the Mahamudra. They are nude except for the subtle indication of diaphanous, clinging *saris.* Their bodies are smooth and unornamented and contrast with the imposing elaborate intricacy of the headdresses which are decorated with flowers, ropes, pearls, diadems, jewellery and the crescent moon, all placed on finely ridged strands of hair, a crowning

mass of glory. Such finesse and exacting attention to detail in the headdress has appeared in this form only once in the history of sculpture, sometimes emulated but never again matched.

The two flying figures resembling cherubic cupids on clouds are appropriate to the obviously erotic tenor of the panel. These forms, along with the string of miniature structures on the lintel above the doorway to the shrine are interrelated, and, when seen together, they act to unify the entire wall. *Nagarajas* at the floor level lean against flat and plain pilasters, guarding the unadorned triple jambed doorway. Bunches of curls flow beneath their crowns, an earlier rather than later sculptural device. Their hoods are concave, rare in Indian art. While the doorway is the entrance to the shrine, at the same time it is the austere frame which isolates the figure of the Buddha; it is the temporal-spiritual transition point.

The Shrine

Light from the outdoors shines upon the Buddha and is in turn reflected back outward. The figure, visible from the doorway, shares the internal space of the shrine with two panels and accompanying seated Buddhas, three at each corner. They represent the three phases of Buddhist transformation, the

(Tri-kaya) :

Nirman-Kaya *or materialistic phase;* Dharma-Kaya *or spiritual phase and* Samboga-Kaya *or transcendental phase*

There are no accompanying *bodhisattvas* in this shrine.

The artists who created the Buddha here were able to bring all conditions into play to produce a masterpiece, while the others, in Caves 3, 2 and 6 fall into decline. The immaculately perfect body which results when thoughts are turned inward, when all externals are shed, when *nirvana* is achieved, can have no purer representation, since the style chosen by the artists was designed to symbolize the transcendence of Buddhahood. It concentrates on massive volumes—in the head, the torso and the limbs—and reduces the forms to fundamental and distinct geometrical units. Not one trace of the interest in surface effects so intricately wrought only recently left behind in the *antarala* remains. It is a style which limits the intensity of plane transitions, clarifies outline, emphasizes massive, heavy, compact and round forms which are concentrations of energy burgeoning outward from within, yet the entire

Cave 7 : Shrine
Buddha

Cave 7 : Shrine
The Buddha is seated on the lion throne in pralambapadasana; *and his hands are in* dharmachakrapravartana mudra.

Cave 7 : Shrine
The hands in the teaching position : dharmachakrapravartana mudra

Cave 7 : Shrine
The head of the Buddha

Cave 7 : Shrine, north wall
Avalokiteshvara, Tara and Sudhanakumara

surface is burnished meticulously; the resulting smoothness counteracts these fierce internal forces. The fullness of convexities and contours are stressed, while anything relating to squareness is avoided, even as the ceiling and walls are emphatically rectangular, flat and bare, to create an environment reflecting the void.

The Buddha's figure is a uniquely coherent totality, all parts of which are relevant to one another, even though a good amount of weight is deposited in the massive legs. Although it is enormous in size, it nevertheless exhibits a rhythmic flow from one form to another; each in itself is accentuated by the exquisite linear surface treatment of the diaphanous drapery which hugs the body, by the grace of well proportioned hands in the *dharmachakrapravartana mudra* and in the head, neck, torso and arms. It is a work of rare significance representing the culminating moment of classic perfection. A quiet hour spent in the shrine helps to reveal the infinite subtleties by means of which the concept of enlightenment is translated into sculpture in human form.

The replica of a wooden throne is carved with *makara* emitting foliage representing the head of a goose and an accompanying *naga*—both fertility symbols, a warrior on an elephant's head and a rider on a lion who represents :

Maravijaya of the Sakyasimha

All are united in a continuous interrelationship of flowing, interconnecting forms. The multiplicity of engaged forms contrasts with the bold separate units of the Buddha's unadorned surfaces. Like the flying figures which emanate out of the Ashtamahabhaya Avalokiteshvara, they emerge out of the still centre, the Buddha, reflecting the shifting and changing conditions of life with its never-ending relationships of interdependent forms. As if to contain all this outflowing of energy, the *tri-kayas* form vertical frames on each side at the corners : and there are graceful flying figures *(gandharvas* and *apsaras).* The Buddha's figure is surrounded by a flat *prabhamandala.*

While the inclusion in the shrine of the Buddha of a panel with the provocative sensuous Dancing Tara flanked by the musical deities might have been inappropriate to the earlier puritanical Buddhism, it is a natural combination for this period when the Vajrayana - Tantra sects had incorporated folk elements. The monasteries continually sought accommodation with the popular cults. The dance had originated as worship in prehistoric times, and throughout the historical period it persisted as a mode of contacting and praising the divinity. So strong was this instinct that even though the Buddha had prohibited dancing, it could not be inhibited by any

ideology. By the 5th and 6th centuries, repressions had been lifted, and the dance found its natural way back into the stream of Buddhist worship.

The central figure represents :

> *Dancing Tara*—Nritya *Tara. She is supposed to be accompanied by the deities who are music and dance personified. In Buddhist texts there are various lists, one of which the sculptors here seem to have followed.*

From the viewer's left to right they are :

Khannjanika	*wag-tail instrument player*
Vamsha	*flute player*
Mirkunda (Tara)	*player of the instrument of measure*
Muraja	*tamborine player*
Karatalika	*clapper*
Mridanga	*drummer*

The group of seven constitutes the expression of the concept of dance and music based on seven notes (sptasvarabhuta nrityagitadi).

The arc of the seven heads, if extended to the blank rectangle beneath the composition would close as an oval shape with the central point situated between the feet of the dancer. A reversed photograph placed in this position shows the artist's intention of creating an analogy of the figures with the spokes of a wheel, an important Buddhist symbol. Recognition of this immediately sets the composition into motion. The underlying grid of circle, diagonals and circumference, which the sculptor had originally incised upon the wall prior to initiating the work, determines the skeletal structure of the configuration. Points set at toe, ankle, loin, navel, breasts, the joints, neck, chin, nose, forehead and headdresses provide hints for the reconstruction of the grid, which determines the interrelationships of the rythmic sequences of volumes and spaces. By connecting these points one to the other, a complex linear diagram composed of triangles, circles, arcs and diamonds which originally had organized the vacant space, now remains inherent in the finished work.

While the grid is a stabilizing factor, at the same time its multiple arrangements define rhythmic harmonies, counterpoint, mobility and continual syncopation resulting from the juxtaposition of forms varying in size, weight

Cave 7 : Shrine wall, south
One of the three phases (kaya)

Cave 7 : Shrine wall, north
The three phases (tri-kaya) *with Avalokiteshvara*

Cave 7 : Shrine wall, south
The face of Dancing Tara

Cave 7 : Shrine
Rider on lion (Maravijaya of the Sakyasimha) on the lion throne

Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel
The head of Dancing Tara

and level of depth. Whatever occurs in the panel depends upon an exact adherence to the original geometrical formations. It is this precision and attention to minute divisions of space that defines the classical style at its most perfect moment, and this factor harmonized the Dancing Tara panel with the Buddha figure which itself represents the apotheosis of classical perfection. Even though two moods are portrayed in the adjacent works of art packed into the shrine, an underlying order is seen to have been operating to mirror the harmonies of the goal toward transcendence.

The Dancing Tara panel reflects organic outgrowth which emerges either from a central point at the feet or one on the floor at the base of the median line. The figure of the dancer and its extension to these points is the central stalk out of which four shoots—the figures closest to the dancer—burst upward and outward, while the extensions of the side figures are juxtaposed on a parallel diagonal which varies slightly from the others. The major forms fit within the spaces of circles which radiate out from the central point and also are framed by vertical and horizontal lines drawn at toe, knee, waist, elbow, chin and forehead of Tara. Triangles, with an apex at the top of Tara's head and at the bottom of the median line is the *yantra* inherent in the configuration. Another may be traced at the position of her face. From Tara's navel a diamond shape extends to the circumference. While all is enclosed within a circumference, each of the forms is a centre for subsidiary circles. Their relationships assure continued mobility.

To emphasize her centrality, the dancer's figure is brought substantially forward and is carved in three dimensions, while the musical deities are recessed against the back wall, although they are placed on varying planes. This is yet another instance of a basic Indian compositional emphasis on forms which proliferate out from a still figure placed on the central vertical axis.

Packed into the shrine are the polarities—the ascetic and the passionate—which in India are the amalgam of life. One who strives after salvation should enjoy *prajnaparamita,* a universal feminine attribute.

In a small panel facing the Dancing Tara, there is another depiction :

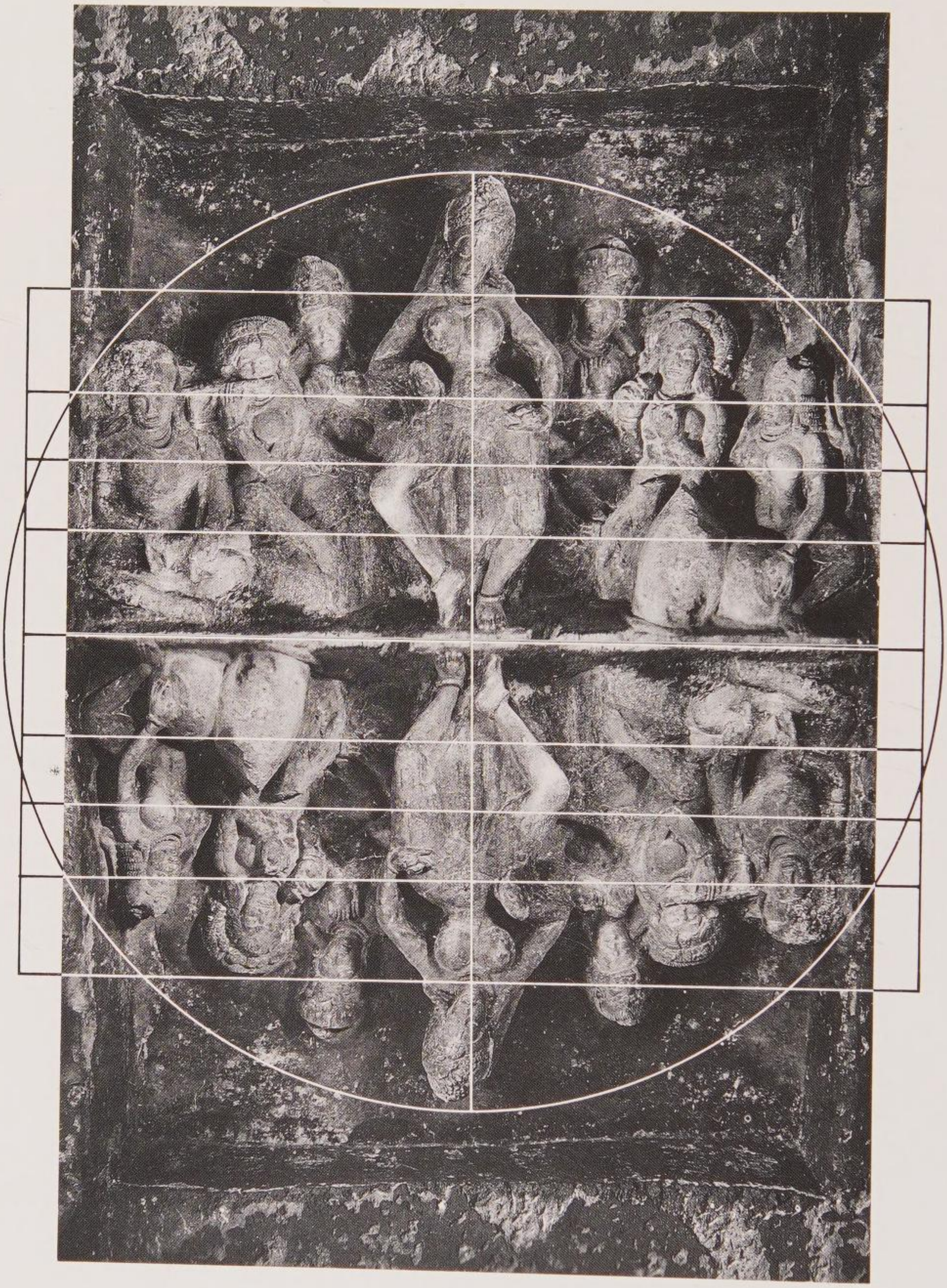
Avalokiteshvara
Tara holding a lotus and
Sudhanakumara

The seated position of the central shrine Buddha is repeated in the Buddhas of the shrines in the back (west) wall of the cave, and they are two corners of the

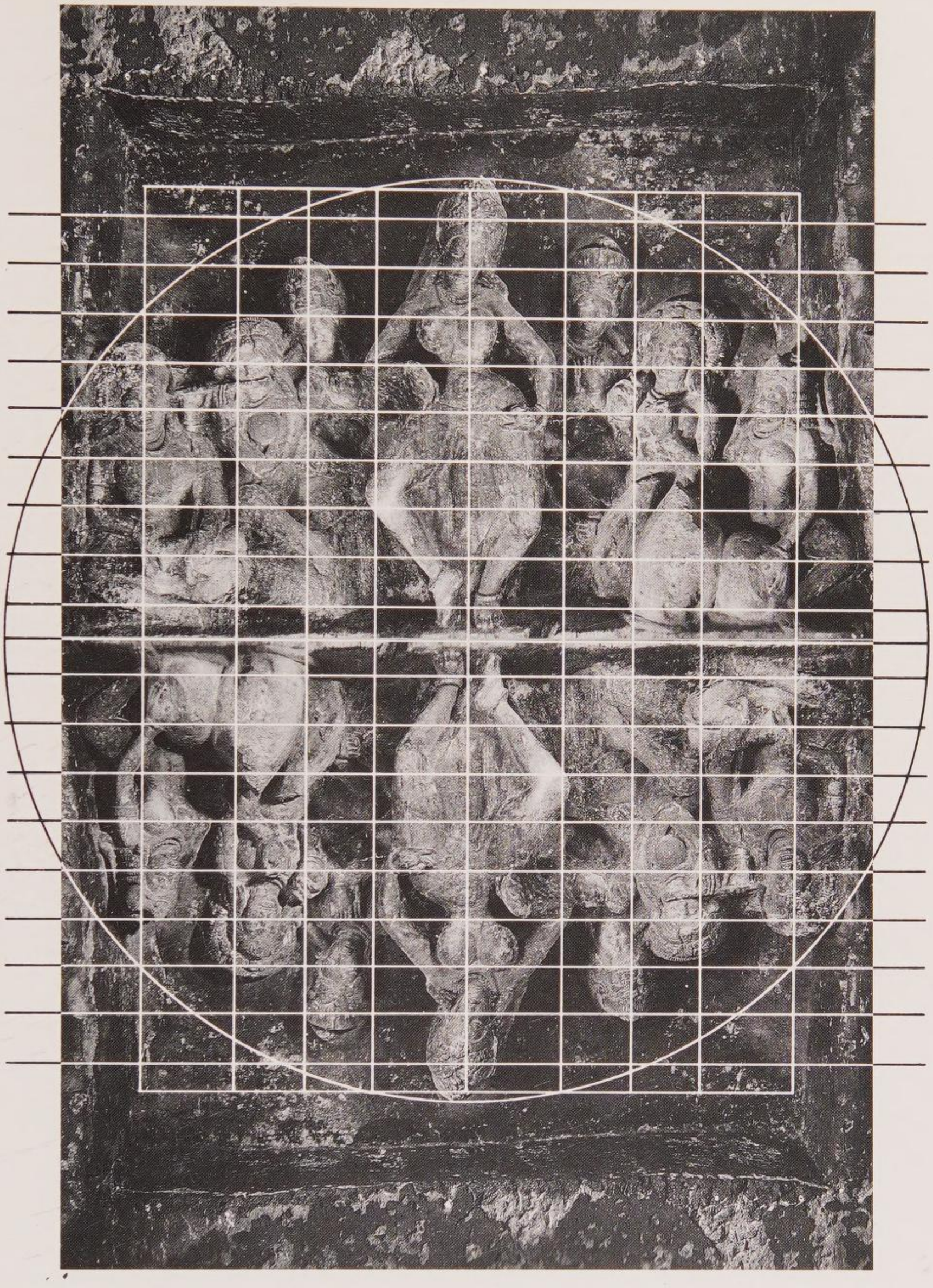
triangle formed by joining all three Buddhas. This is in accordance with the relationship of the central deity with the peripheral elements in a *mandala*. The Buddha is also the apex of a triangle with the *bodhisattvas* at the other angles.

Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel, Dancing Tara : Dancing Tara accompanied by the deities who are music and dance personified. This group of seven constitutes the expression of the concept of sptasvarabhuta nrityagitadi, *i.e., dance and music based on seven notes*

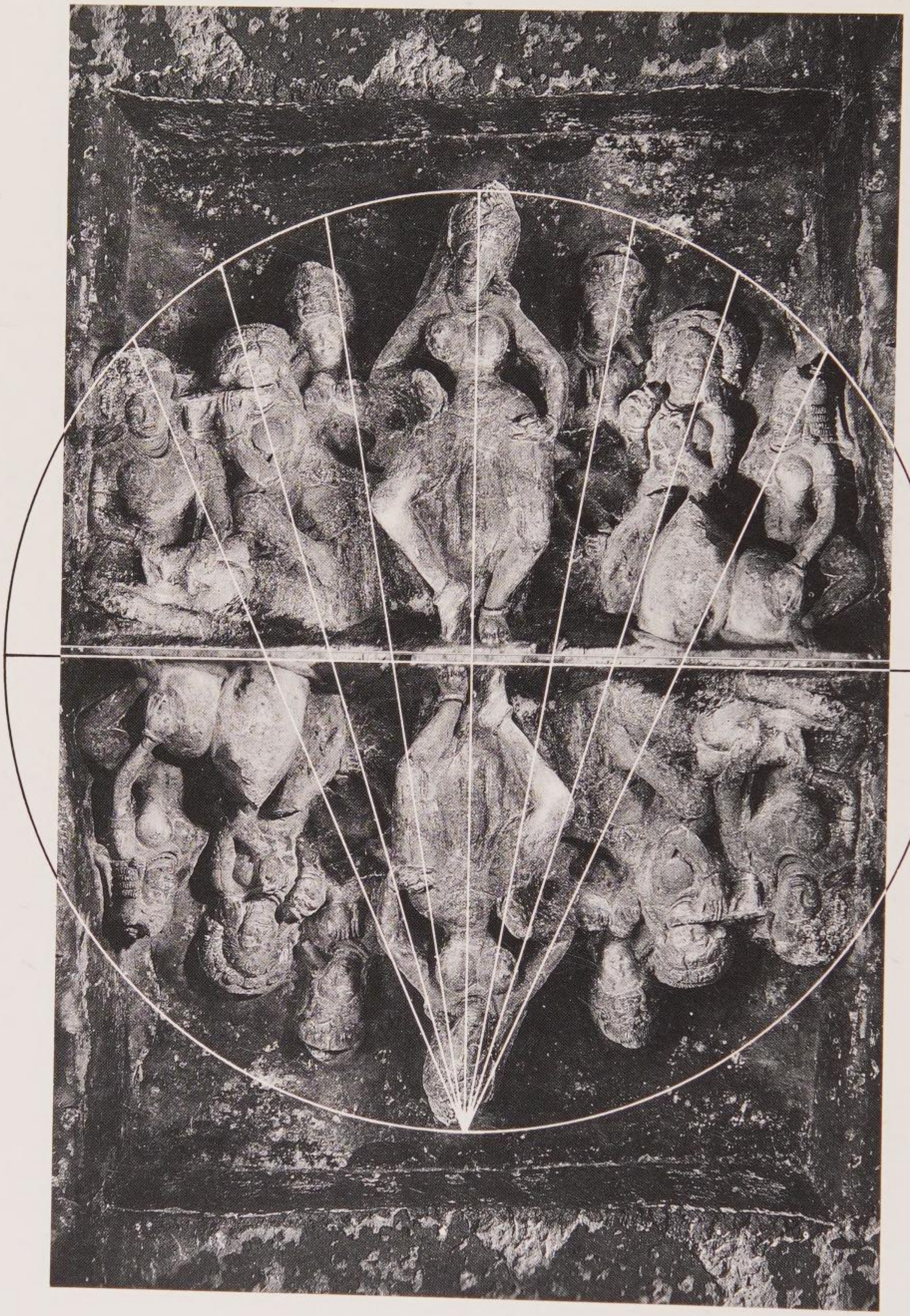
Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel Dancing Tara : The arc of the seven heads, if extended in imagination to the blank rectangle beneath the composition, will initiate mobility and perpetuate it. A reversed photograph will illustrate the artist's intention of stimulating responses to a circular composition with the central point situated between the feet of the dancer



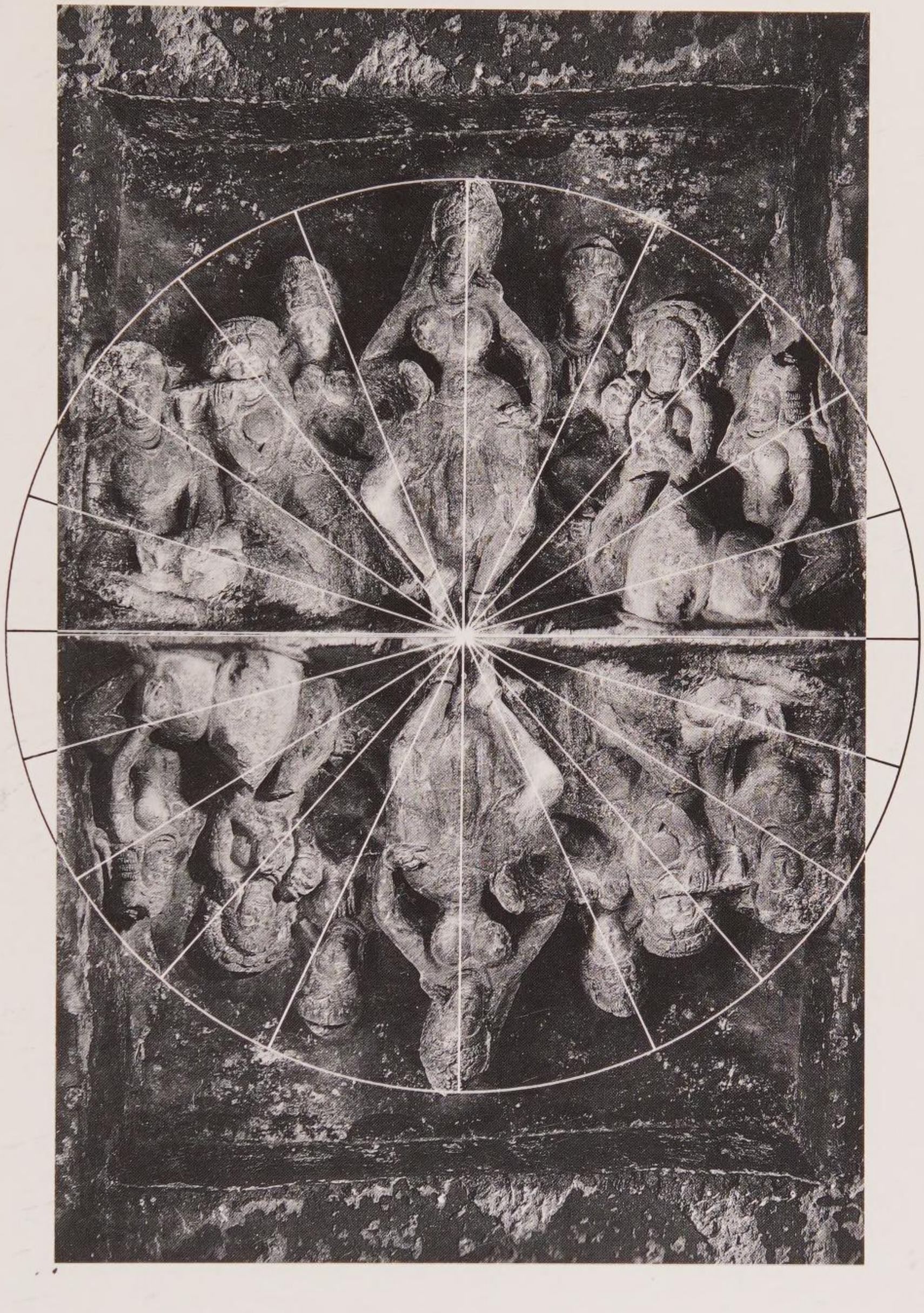
Cave 7 : Shrine; south wall panel
Dancing Tara : The artist draws lines on the surface of the wall prior to commencement of his carving. The figure of the dancer is divided by horizontals which guide the artist in working out proportions. The major forms fit within lines drawn at the toe, knee, waist, elbow, chin and forehead of Tara



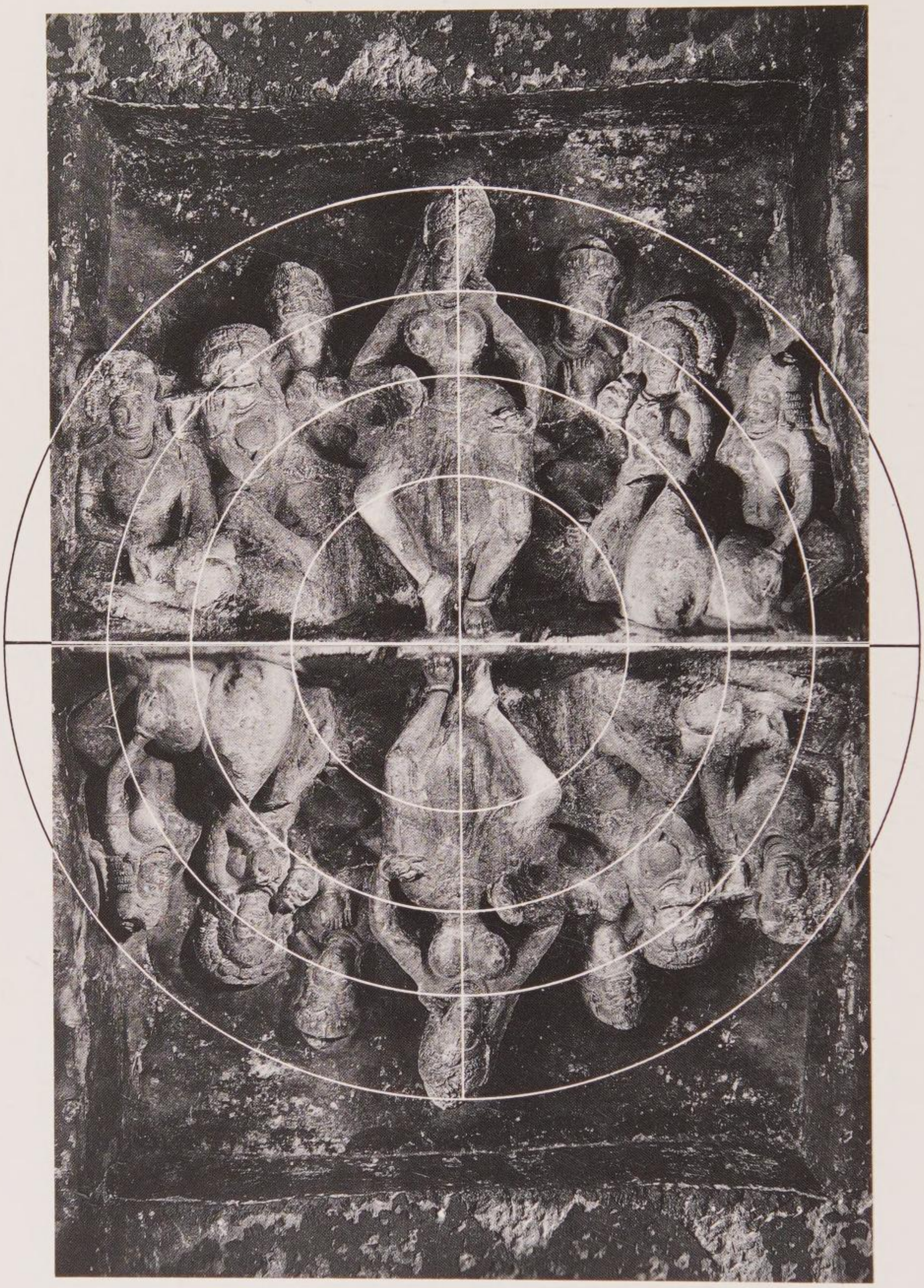
Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel
Dancing Tara : Vertical placement assures classic order. The heads are framed in rhythmic sequence



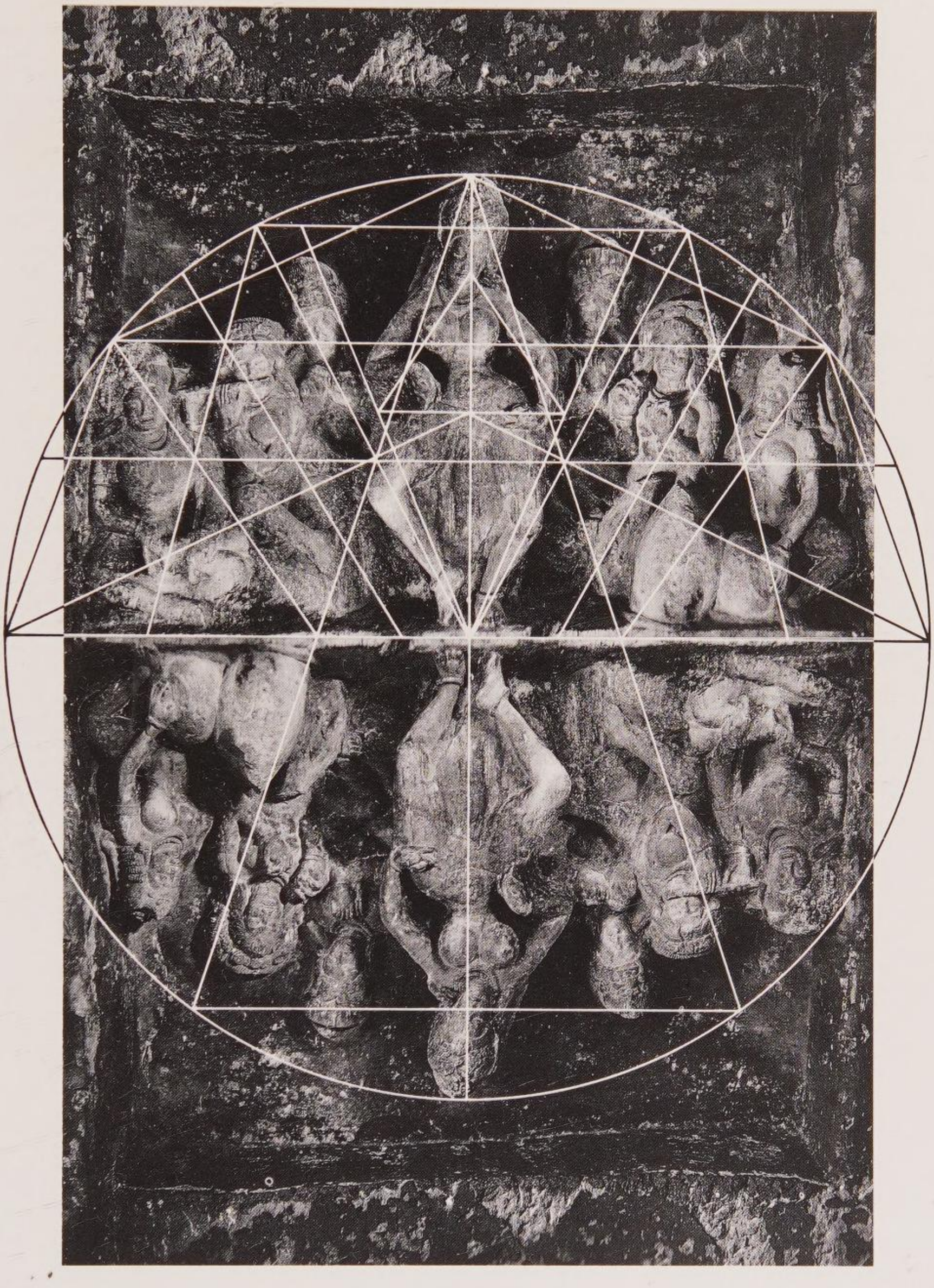
Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel
Dancing Tara : Tara's figure is aligned along a central axis; the diagonal thrusts, extending from an imaginary central point at the bottom, will fan out and shoot through the centre of each figure, although the artist made sure not to make the arrangement mechanical



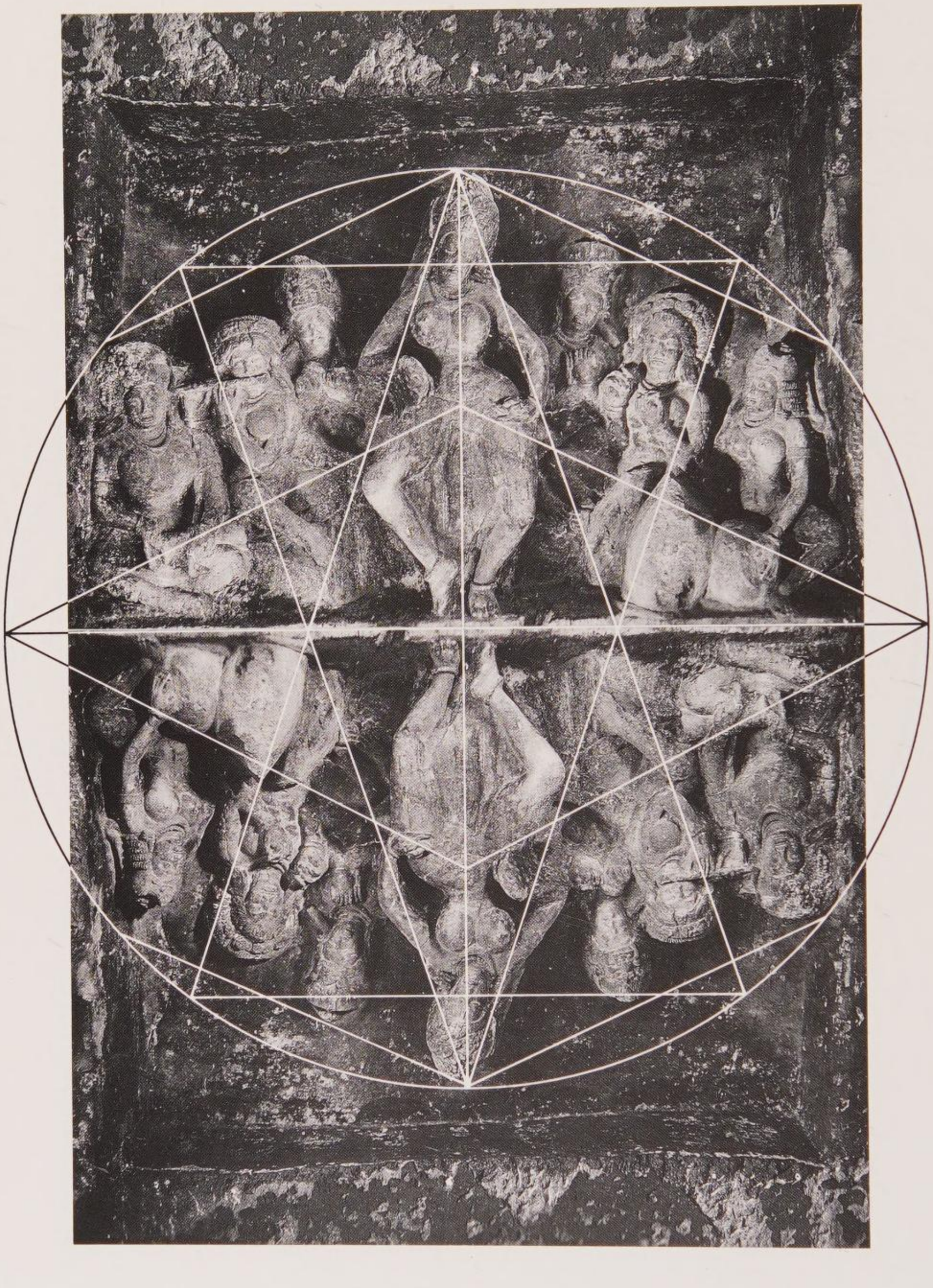
Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel
Dancing Tara : The figures are aligned in relationships which imitate the spokes of a wheel



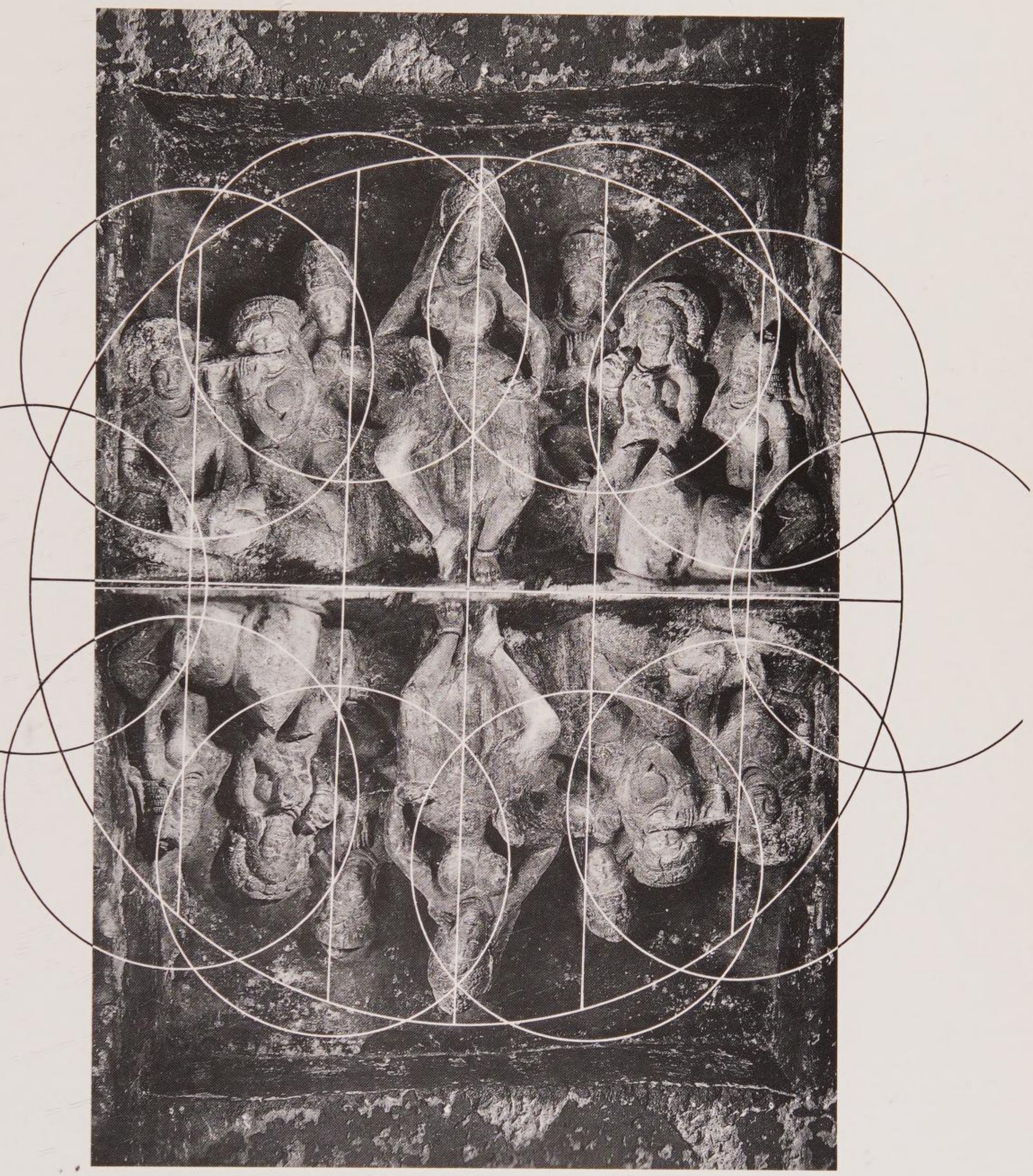
Cave 7 : Shrine : south wall panel,
Dancing Tara : Circular divisions reveal the artist's concentrated efforts to suggest motion by placing forms within the confines of expanding circles



Cave 7 : Shrine : south wall panel
Dancing Tara : The geometry inherent in the composition



Cave 7 : Shrine : south wall panel
Dancing Tara : The diagram shows reversed triangles, the central point and the circumference which suggests the Durga yantra *inherent in the configuration. From Tara's navel a diamond shape extends to the circumference*



Cave 7 : Shrine : south wall panel
Dancing Tara : Each of the forms is a power centre from which energies expand outward

Cave 7 : Shrine : south wall panel
Dancing Tara : Vamsha and Mirkunda

< *Cave 7 : Shrine : south wall panel*
Dancing Tara : Khannjanika, Vamsha

Cave 7 : Shrine : south wall panel
Dancing Tara

Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel
Dancing Tara : Mirkunda

Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel
Dancing Tara : Muraja, tamborine player

Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel
Dancing Tara : Karatalika, clapper

Cave 7 : Shrine, south wall panel
Dancing Tara : Karatalika and Mridanga, clapper and drummer

Cave 6

The ascent towards the Buddha continues into this cave, which is situated at a higher level than Cave 7. Nine stairs are climbed to reach the *mandapa,* four feet in height, which is entered through a series of four columns, only recently restored by the Archaeological Survey. The solid wall with *bodhisattvas,* which in Cave 7 led to the *antarala,* is here replaced by two square central columns with lotus and half-lotus medallions bearing lateral brackets. The pilasters are connected to a corner block which separates the *mandapa* from the *pradakshinapatha;* thus circumambulation is of the *antarala* as well as of the shrine. The columns are decorated :

Tara standing under foliage and beneath her a seated Jambhala (or Pancika) on the south column, accompanied by Vasudhara and Hariti on the north column

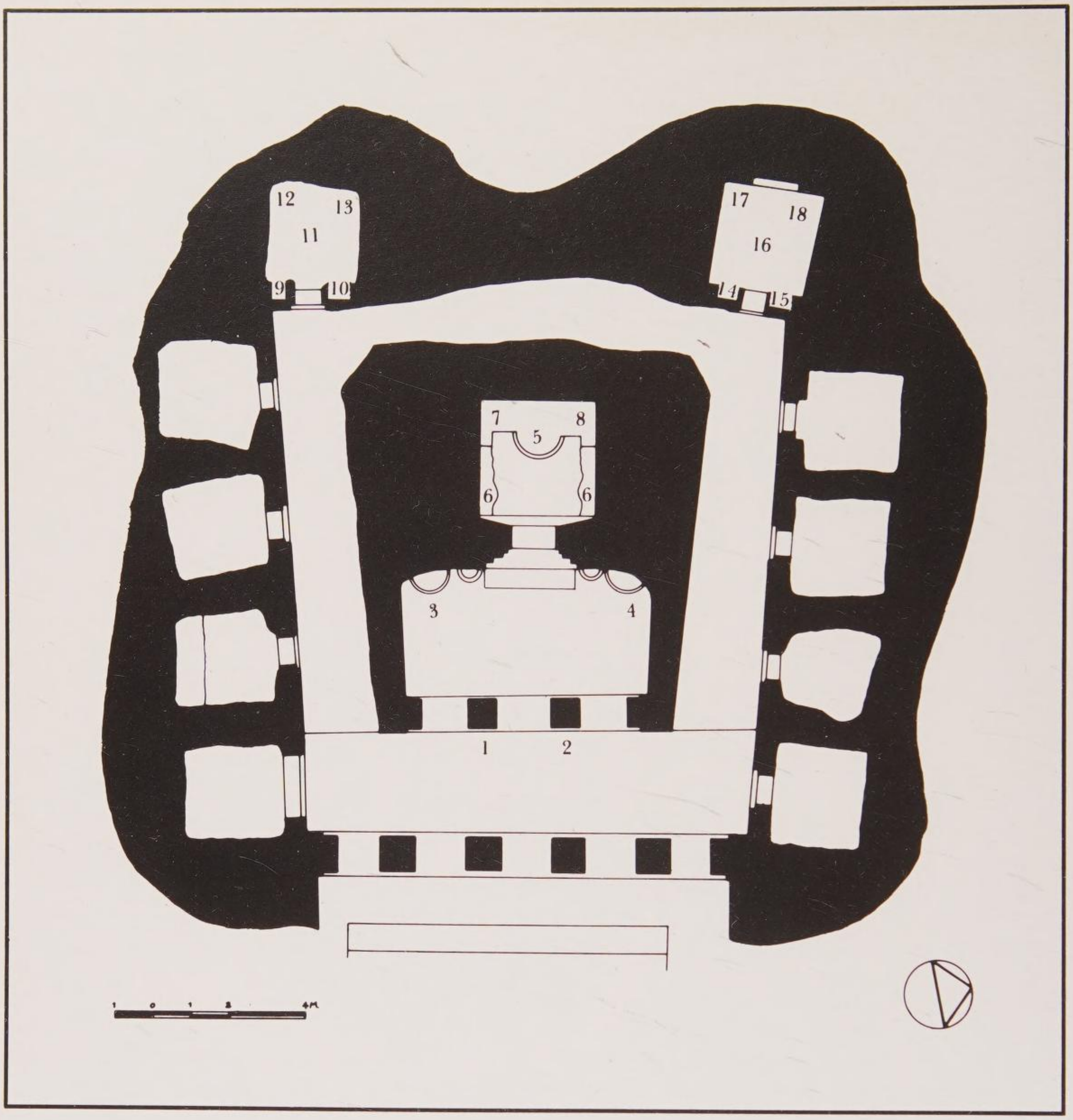
The brackets of the columns are ornamented with vestigal carvings. This column arrangement of a triptych of voids is best appreciated from inside the shrine, showing a magnificent view of the valley, illuminating the Buddha with direct and reflected light. The height of the Buddha is emphasized in the descent from the shrine; two steps to the *antarala* and again one foot to the *mandapa.*

The two large sculptured panels are not carved with the attention and emphasis on excellence which was observed in Cave 7. While there are moments when there is still life in the statues, grace and skill has been lost; they are heavy and poorly modelled. The artists understood the gross technical requirements, but the spirit had waned. Possibly only a generation in time had elapsed, but the climactic achievement of Cave 7 was destined not to be repeated.

Facing the panel to the viewer's left, in succession from the viewer's left to right are :

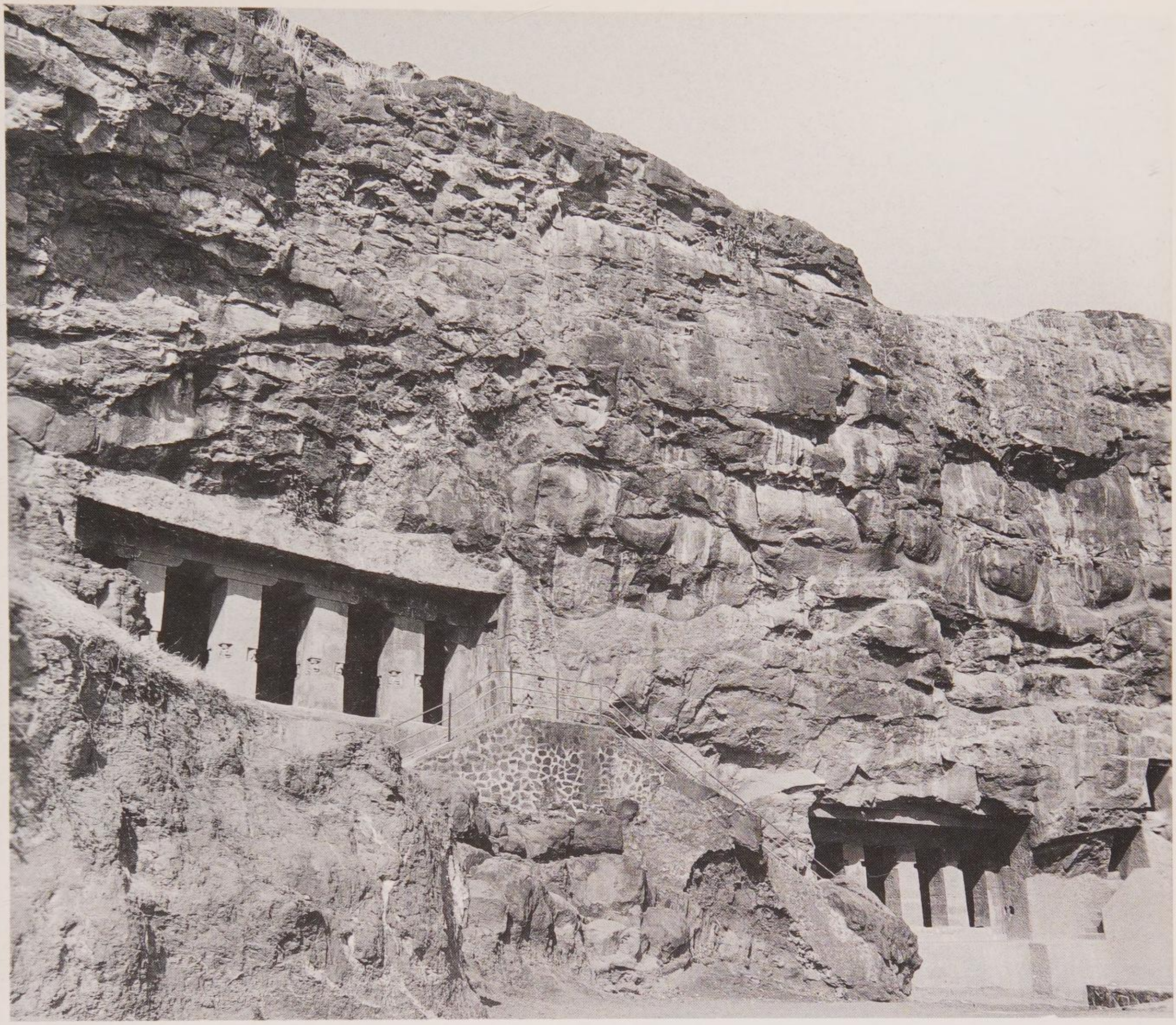
Kumara
Namasangiti Manjusri
Tara
Jambhala or Pancika *on the door jamb*
Nagaraja *on the door jamb*

Facing the panel to the viewer's right, in succession from the viewer's left to right are :

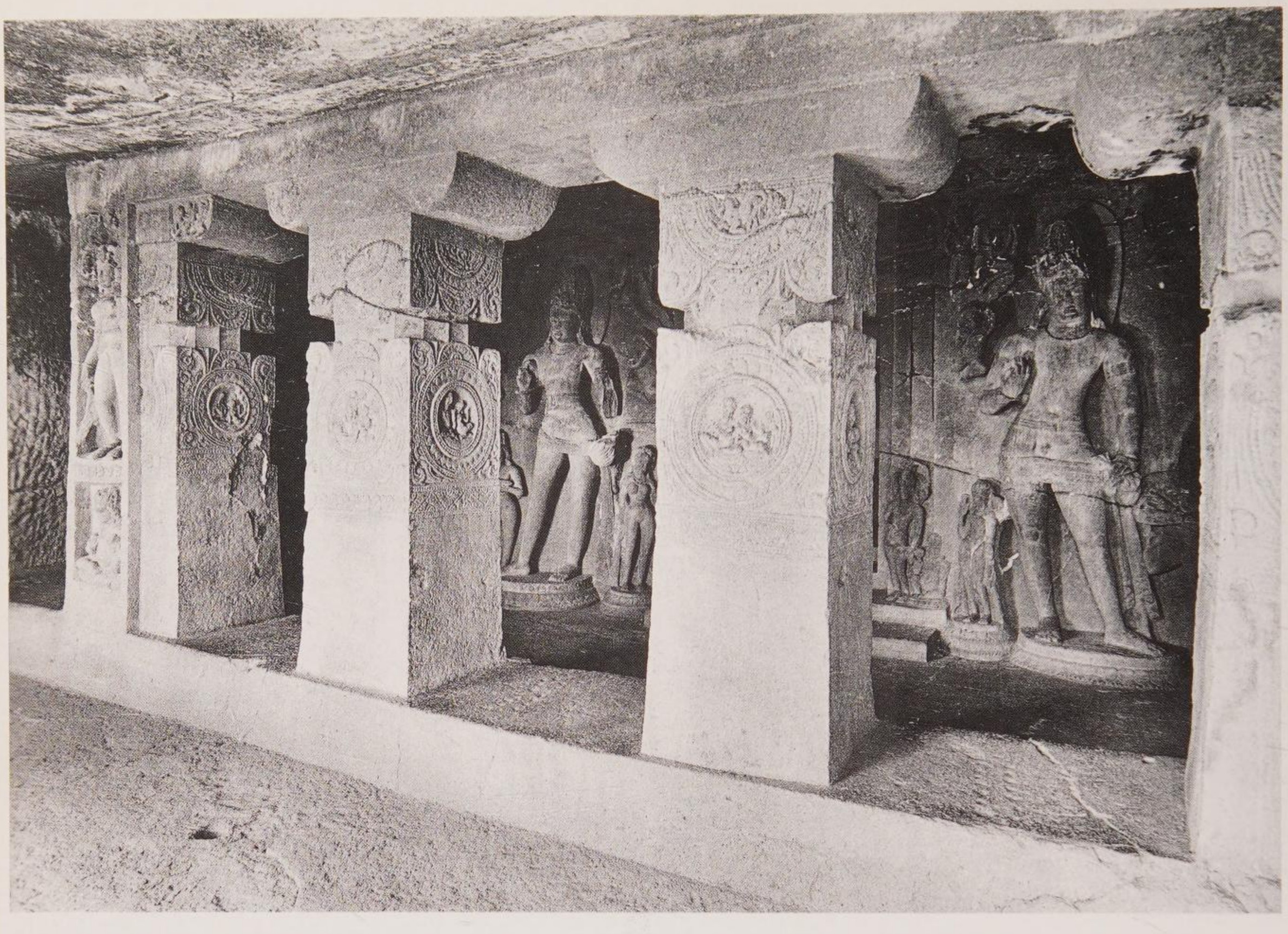


Cave 6 :

1. Tara, Jambhala, Vasudhara and Hariti
2. Tara and Jambhala
3. Namasangiti Manjusri
4. Vajrapani-Lokeshvara
5. Buddha
6. Attendant deities
7. Maitreya (?)
8. Avalokiteshvara
9. Avalokiteshvara
10. Vajrapani
11. Buddha Amitabha
12. Avalokiteshvara
13. Avalokiteshvara
14. Avalokiteshvara
15. Vajrapani
16. Buddha Vairocana
17. Adi-Buddha on wall
18. Adi-Buddha on wall



Caves 6 and 7, a view from the east

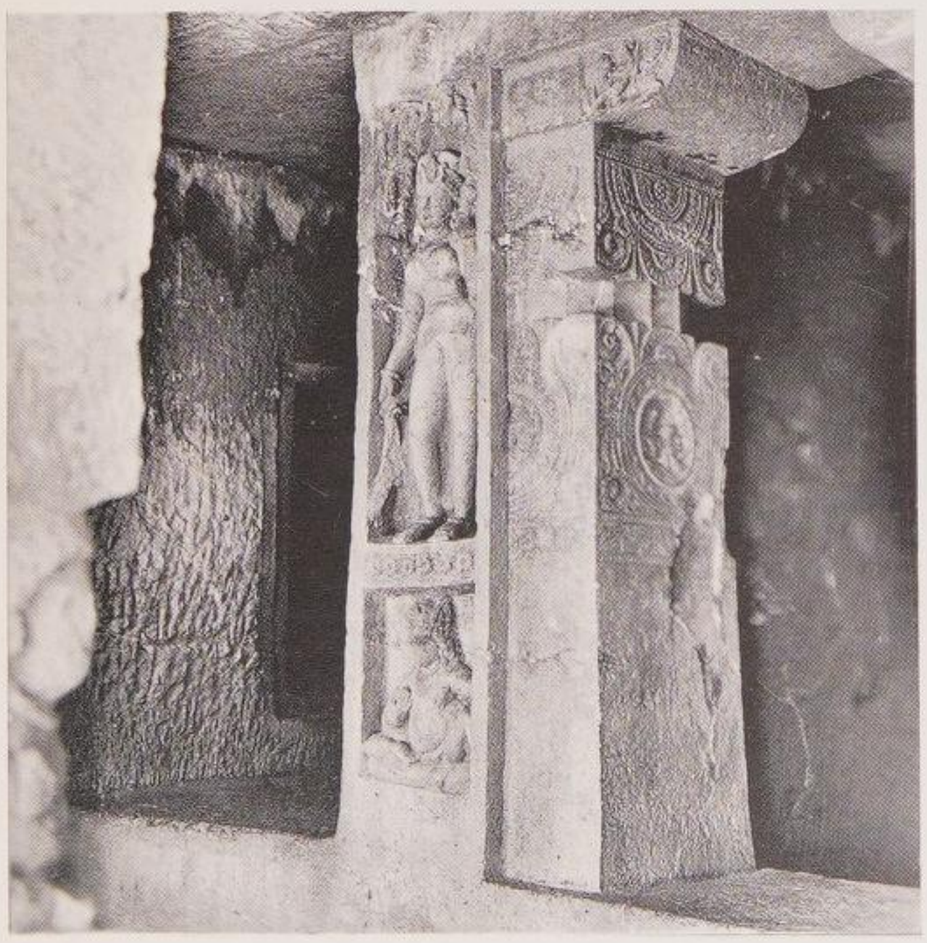


Cave 6 :
The columns of the vestibule with bodhisattva *panels : Namasangiti Manjusri and Vajrapani-Lokeshvara*

Cave 6 :
A view from the vestibule, looking outward

Cave 6 : Vestibule, south panel
From the viewer's left to right : Kumara, Namasangiti Manjusri, Tara, and on the door jamb, Jambhala (or Pancika) and nagaraja

Cave 6 : Vestibule, north panel
From the viewer's left to right : nagaraja *and Jambhala (or Pancika) on the door jamb; Prajnaparamita, Vajrapani-Lokeshvara and Mara*



Cave 6 : Vestibule
A roundel and a half-roundel on a square column, with the Vajrapani-Lokeshvara panel in the background

< *Cave 6 :*
A column with Tara and Jambhala (or Pancika)

Cave 6
The door leading to the shrine with nagarajas, *Buddha Sakyasimha is seated in the* pralambapadasana *and showing the* vyakhyana mudra (dharmachakrapravartana mudra)

a

b

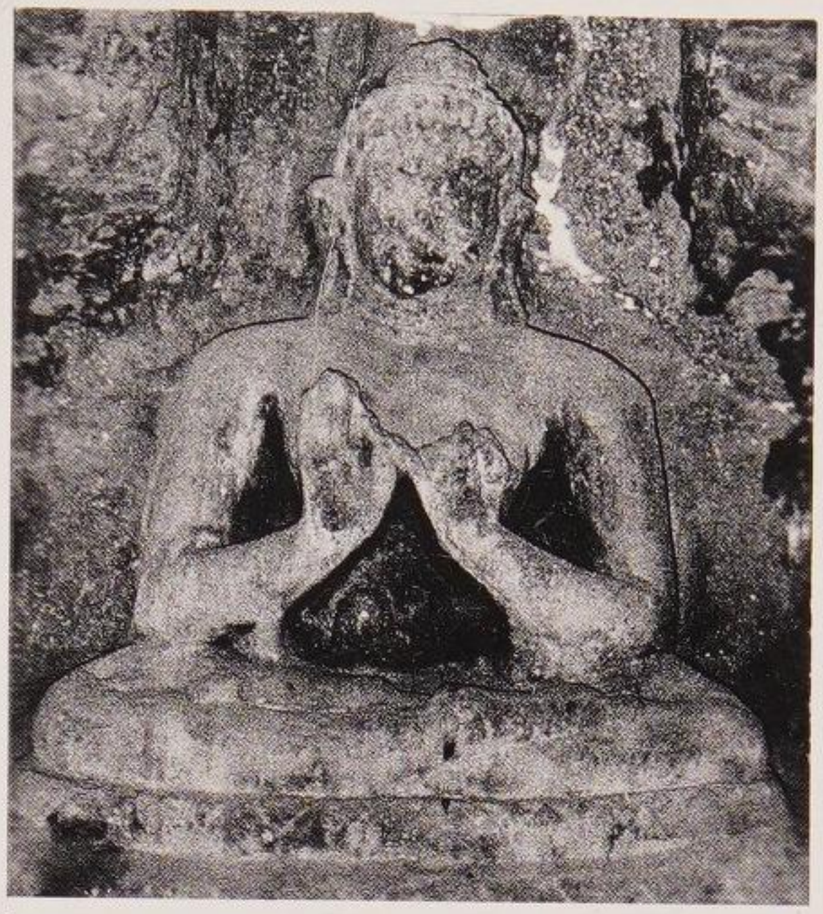
b

b

a *Cave 6 :*
The back (west) wall, south shrine

b *Cave 6 : Back wall (west); south shrine*
Avalokiteshvara on the viewer's left, and Vajrapani on the viewer's right as he faces the Buddha in the shrine. He is Buddha Amitabha, seated in padmasana *with* dhyana mudra

a



b

b

b

a *Cave 6 : Back wall (west), north shrine*

b *Cave 6 : Back wall (west); north shrine*
Avalokiteshvara on the viewer's left and Vajrapani on the viewer's right as he faces the Buddha in the shrine. He is Buddha Vairocana

Nagaraja	*on the door jamb*
Jambhala or Pancika	*on the door jamb*
Prajnaparamita	*goddess of wisdom*
Vajrapani-Lokeshvara	*the* bodhisattva *who holds the* vajra *in his left hand.and has a* stupa *as emblem in his headdress*
Mara	*the personified Kama (desire) or evil, whom Gautama Buddha defeated while achieving the supreme knowledge*

The Shrine

The shrine is square, and it is centrally located vis-a-vis the back walls of the cells on the west and the entrance columns on the east. These boundaries form a larger square. The Buddha Sakyasimha sits directly in the centre, surrounded by the sheaths of alternating wall and space.

Decorations on the back of the throne, the Buddha's seated figure and the attendant deities show a deterioration in workmanship; for example, in the disproportionately large feet of the Buddha. However, while the body is flat, the folds of the robes are indicated in a rhythmic sequence as they gracefully fall between the legs, and the hands and head are skillfully rounded. Five males on the south wall and five females on the north kneel in adoration; in style and execution, however, they are but a faint reminder of their predecessors in the shrine of Cave 3. The flying figures on the west wall of the shrine are large and still retain some validity as works of art. The *bodhisattvas* are also graceful, with swaying postures -- Avalokiteshvara, on the Buddha's left, has a lovely lotus and stalk.

Buddha Sakyasimha (is) seated in the pralambapadasana *and showing the* vyakhyana mudra *(which is identical with* dharmachakrapravartana mudra*). He is attended by a* bodhisattva *(who is probably Maitreya-C.B.) and Padmapani Avalokiteshvara on his right and left respectively. The lion in the seat has double implications: 1) it refers to his seat as the* simhasana, *meaning the royal seat, with a pun on the word* simha; *2) it refers to the figure as that of Siddhartha—Gautama who is known as the lion of the Sakya race—Sakyasimha*

Cave 2 :
A view from the mandapa

At the back of Cave 6 there is an interesting arrangement of Buddhas in two corner shrines, each flanked by *bodhisattvas* in front of the entrance. Facing the shrine on the viewer's left (south), seated within the shrine, is :

Buddha Amitabha
(not to be confused with the so-called Dhyani Buddha Amitabha); in padmasana *with* dhyana mudra

The *bodhisattva* on the viewer's left at the jamb of the south shrine of the back wall is :

Avalokiteshvara

and on the viewer's right is :

Vajrapani

In the northwest corner, the small shrine houses :

Buddha Vairocana
(not the so-called Dhyani Buddha of the same name) in padmasana *and* dharmachakrapravartana mudra

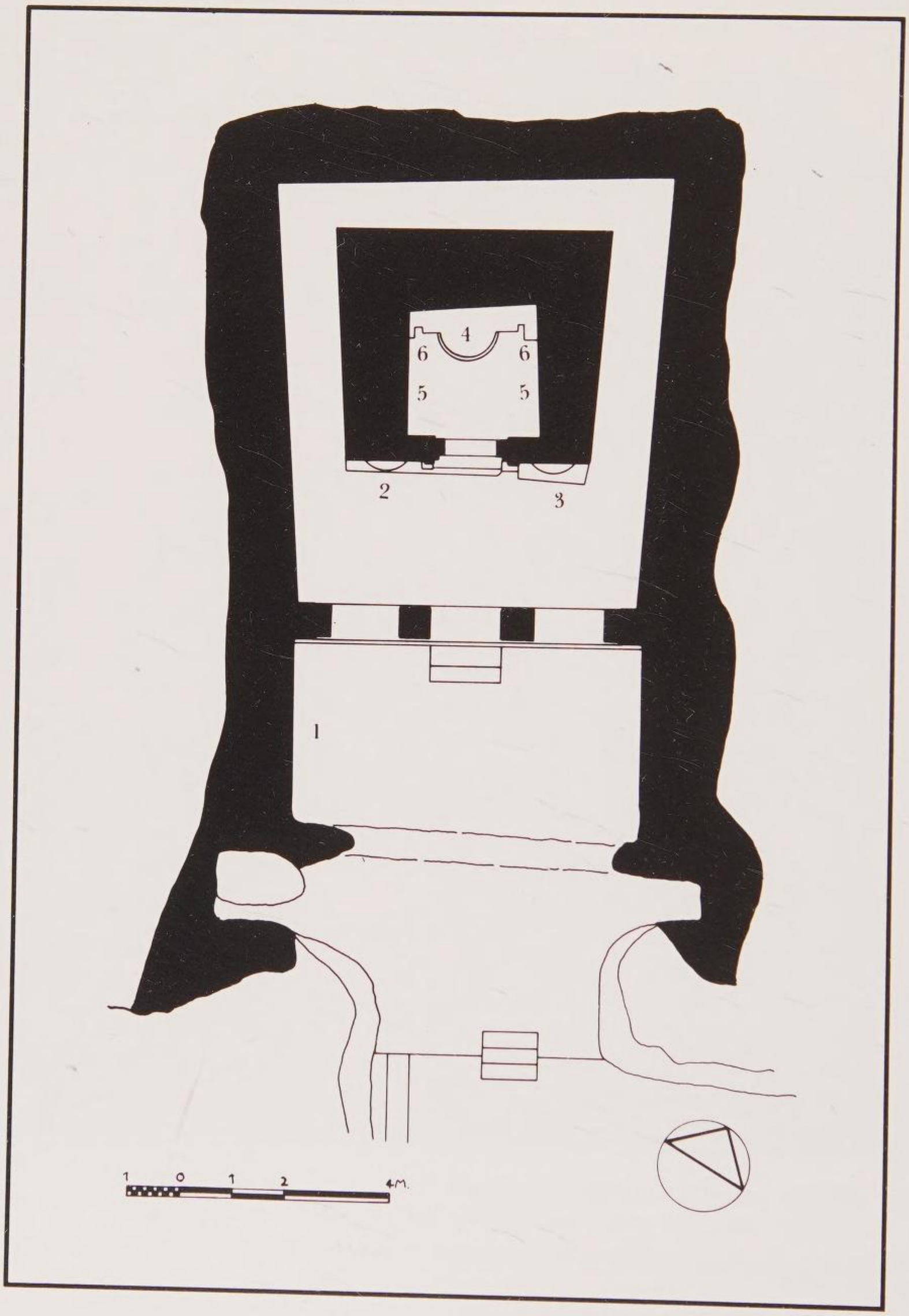
The *bodhisattva* to the viewer's left is
Avalokiteshvara
and on the viewer's right is :
Vajrapani

While in the south shrine the seated Buddha is flanked by the *bodhisattvas*, and flying figures are carved on over-hanging rock, in the north shrine Adi-Buddhas accompany the seated Buddha. The cells at the back wall are peripheral elements in the *mandala*, the still centre of which is represented by the Buddha in the central shrine.

There are only eight cells for meditation here. Pilgrims and worshipers must have enjoyed the high ceilings and the light penetrating along the *pradakshinapatha* which reaches the cells on the west wall.

The painting on the *mandapa* ceiling is original; it hints at what the cave must have looked like when all the surfaces were painted. There are circles, peacocks and human couples in blue, peach and white still faintly visible.

Caves 6 and 7 :
View from the north



Cave 2 :

1. Vajrapani
2. Avalokiteshvara
3. Maitreya
4. Buddha
5. Buddha and bodhisattvas *in various positions*
6. Kayas
7. Mahapratiharya

Cave 2

What was probably the *mandapa* is now in ruins, but it is worthwhile to observe the *bodhisattva*. He is :

Bodhisattva *Vajrapani holding the* vajra *in his left hand*

This appears in the panel on the viewer's left.

Cave 2 is very small having a *pradakshinapatha* surrounding the central shrine which houses :

the Buddha (Master) *with hands*
in dharmachakrapravartana mudra *and legs*
in pralambapadasana

To the viewer's left on the outside of the shrine wall is a panel showing :

Avalokiteshvara, the compassionate bodhisattva *representing the* sangha (community)

On the viewer's right the panel shows :

Maitreya, the Buddha to come, in the form of
dharma. *Together, these three figures*
represent the Trisharana, *the Buddhist trinity*

The *bodhisattva* figures are counterbalanced and are meant to be observed as a unified composition with the figure of the Buddha in the shrine. Hip extensions and slightly descending shoulders, the turn of the heads and the inverted curves at the waists, and the torsos and arms placed in reversed mirror positions of both complement each other.

With the Buddha placed at a different level of depth, the premier concept of Buddhism is thus given plastic expression. Truth resides in the interaction of the three : the Buddha, Avalokiteshvara as *sangha* and Maitreya as *dharma* conceptually as well as in the style of the sculpture. Buddhahood, law and community are bound each to the other in mutual relationship as are the three statues portrayed here.

The lotus stalks were designed to contain all the linear curves and all the outlines, including the Buddha's *prabhamandala,* which is circular and stabilizes the composition; the outline is lyrical and graceful. The internal curves and continuous outlines lose their specificity and become the melifluous

conduits of rhythms shared by all three figures. All is contour, inverted and convex curve; the line runs on and on continuously closing in on itself with no cessation. With the figure of the Buddha at the apex of an equilateral triangle, the two planes of the trinity are bound into a single unit, which includes the internal volumes within the shrine and the external volumes of the *antarala.* The expression of unity of style and precept gives meaning to the cave. But this reality is not always visible, even though depicting the *Trisharana* is the ultimate intention of the artists. Other views reveal only the *bodhisattvas* in relation to one another. Again with reference to the doctrine of the interdependency of all phenomena, the reality changes as the person moves around.

Each *bodhisattva* holds the banner of the master *(Buddhadvaja)* in the form of an image of the Buddha seated on a lotus in *padmasana* and *dhyana mudra,* each emerging from a mighty lotus stalk. Avalokiteshvara carries the Jina Amitabha in his headdress. He sits on a lotus and is a symbol of universality and transcendence, surmounting a form which may have been a *stupa.* The young *naga* attendant retains the earlier attention to aesthetic excellence. He is:

Virupaksha, a guardian yaksha *or* dikmaharaja *(lord of directions)*

The Jina Amitabha is also in Maitreya's crown of matted hair. He has a deer skin over his left shoulder, showing the head, antlers and tail resting underneath the left armpit, linking the iconography to Sarnath, as in Cave 1. Cherubic flying celestials in postures of adoration bringing wreaths continue the tradition of a millenium.

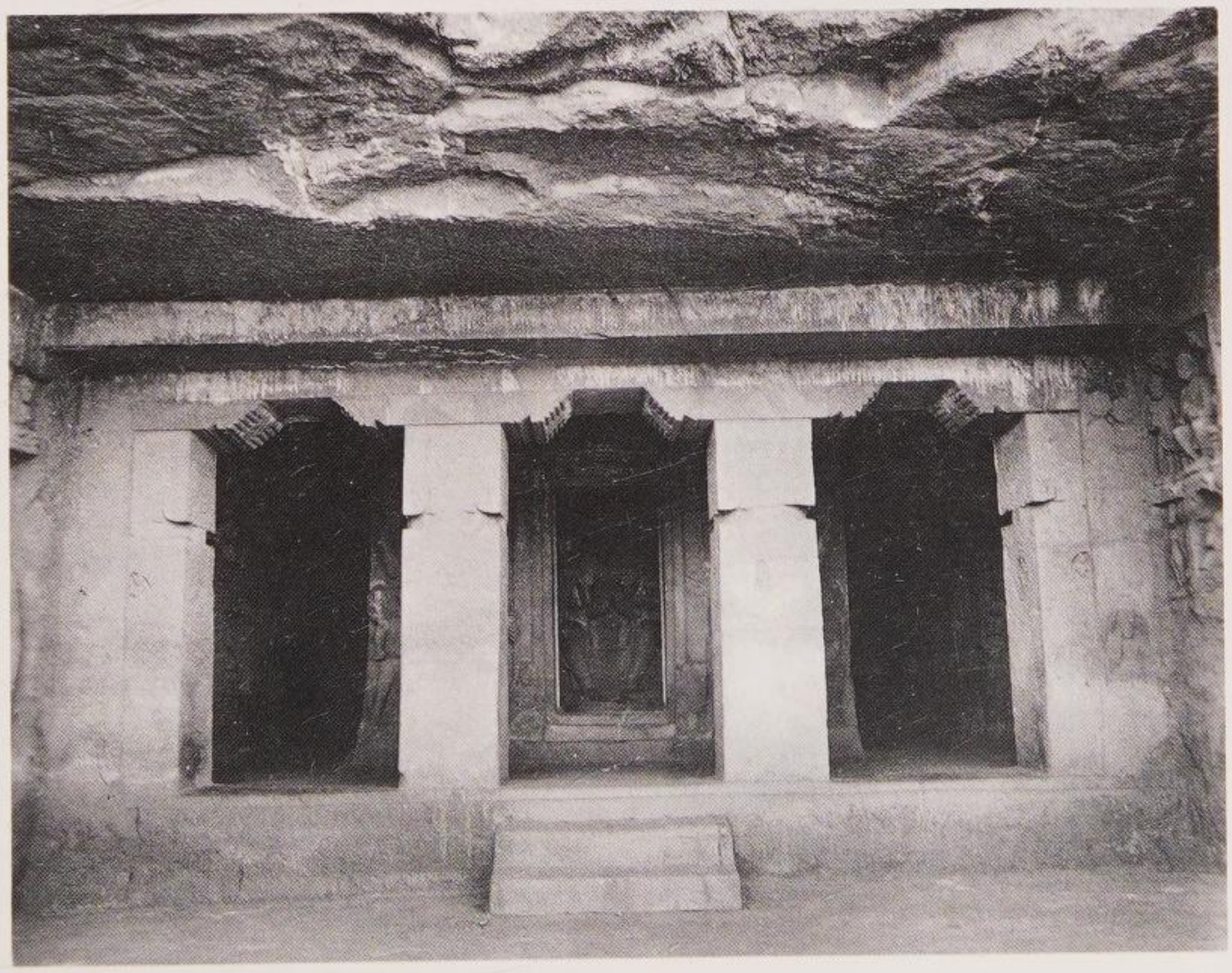
The broken figure holding the bottom of a long lotus stem with two hands near Maitreya is :

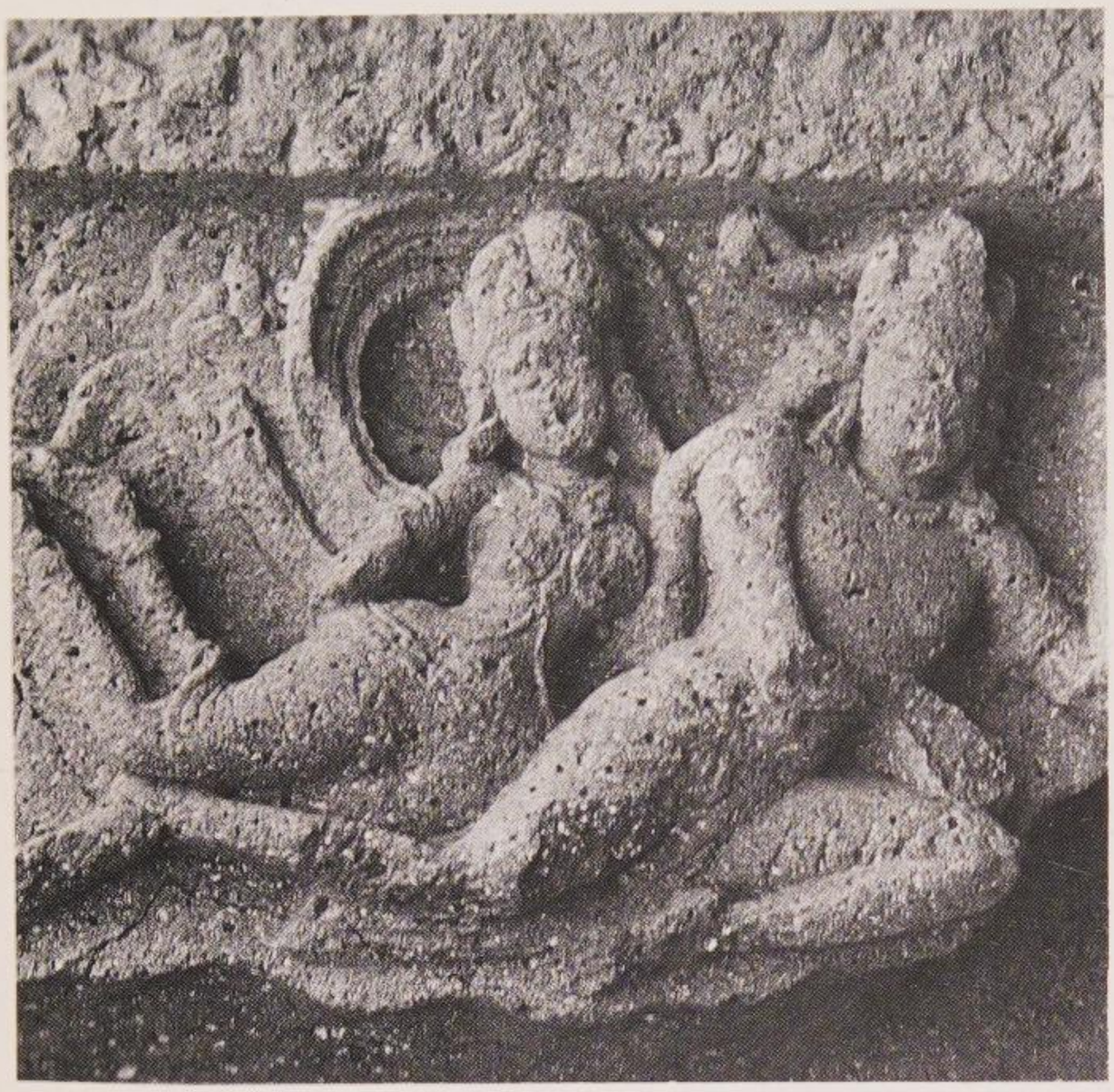
Virudhaka, a guardian yaksha *or* dikmaharaja *(lord of directions)*

A narrow, plain, single door pilaster flanks two flat door jambs surmounted by alternate views of the front and side replicas of apsidal structural temple *mandapas* within which a Buddha sits; the tiers are recessed.

Cave 2
The columns leading to the vestibule with Maitreya and Avalokiteshvara panels in the background

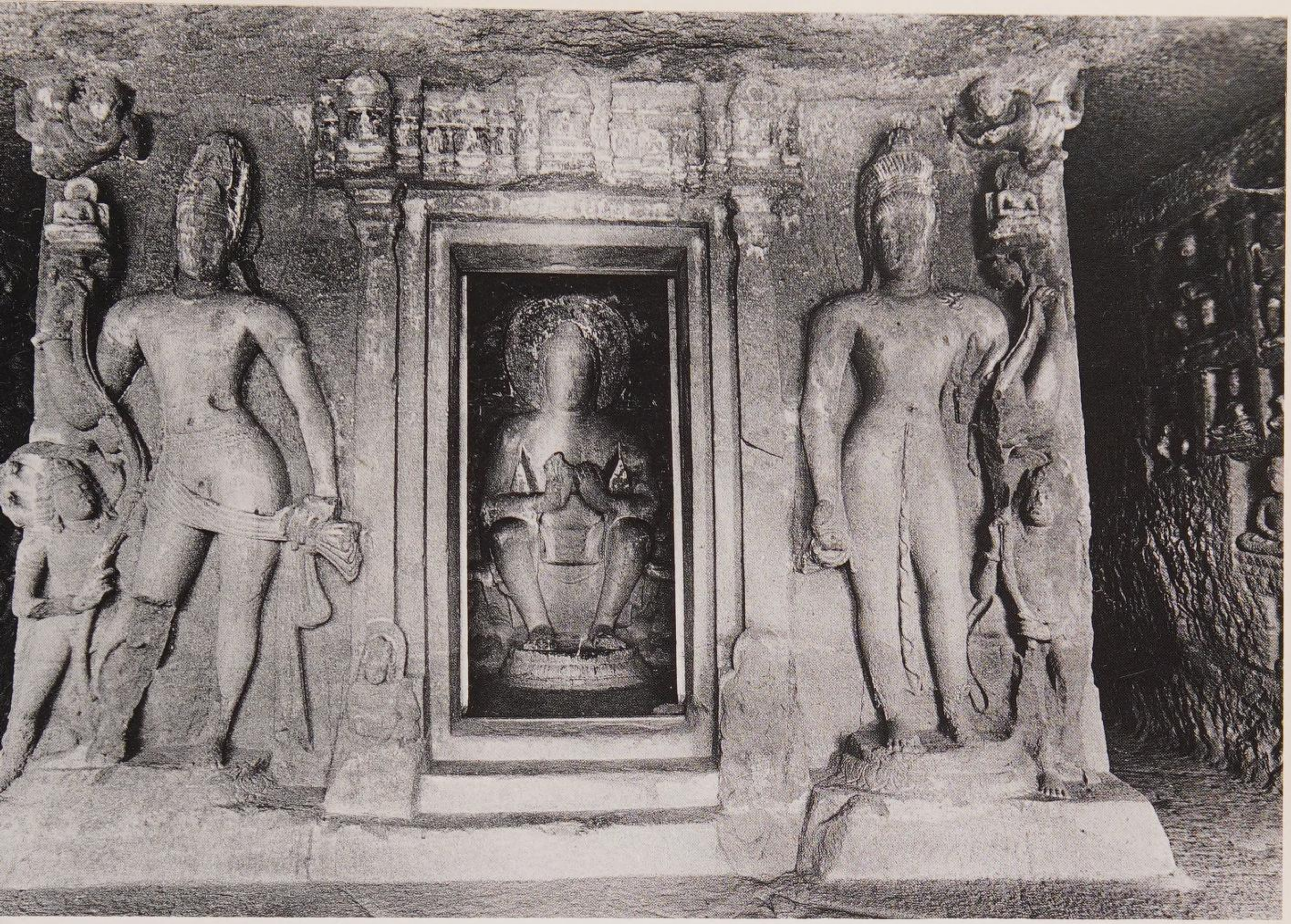
Cave 2 : Facade



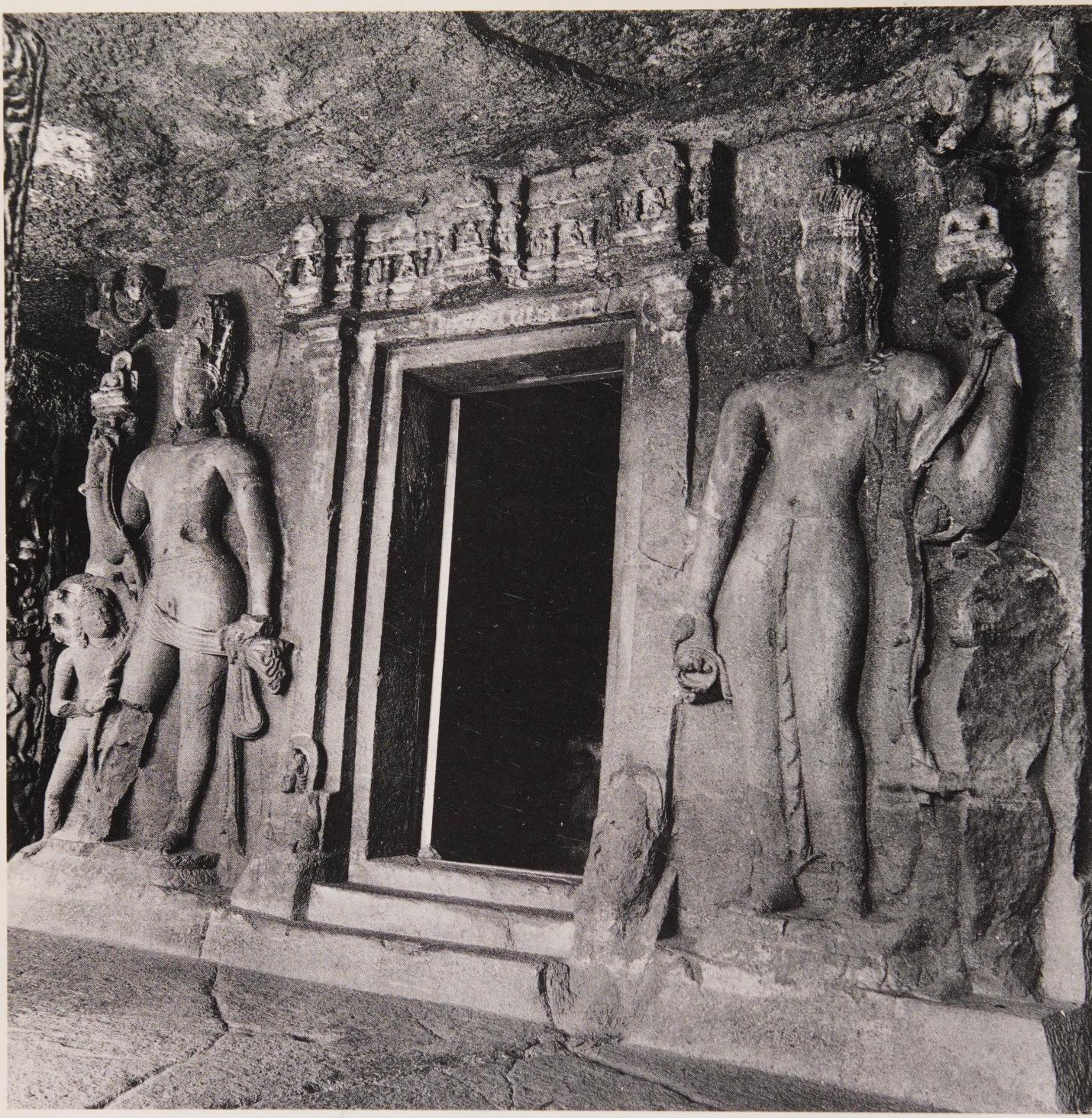


Cave 2 : Mandapa, *south panel (damaged)*
Flying figures

Cave 2 : Mandapa, *south panel (damaged)*
Vajrapani, flying figures and Adi-Buddha

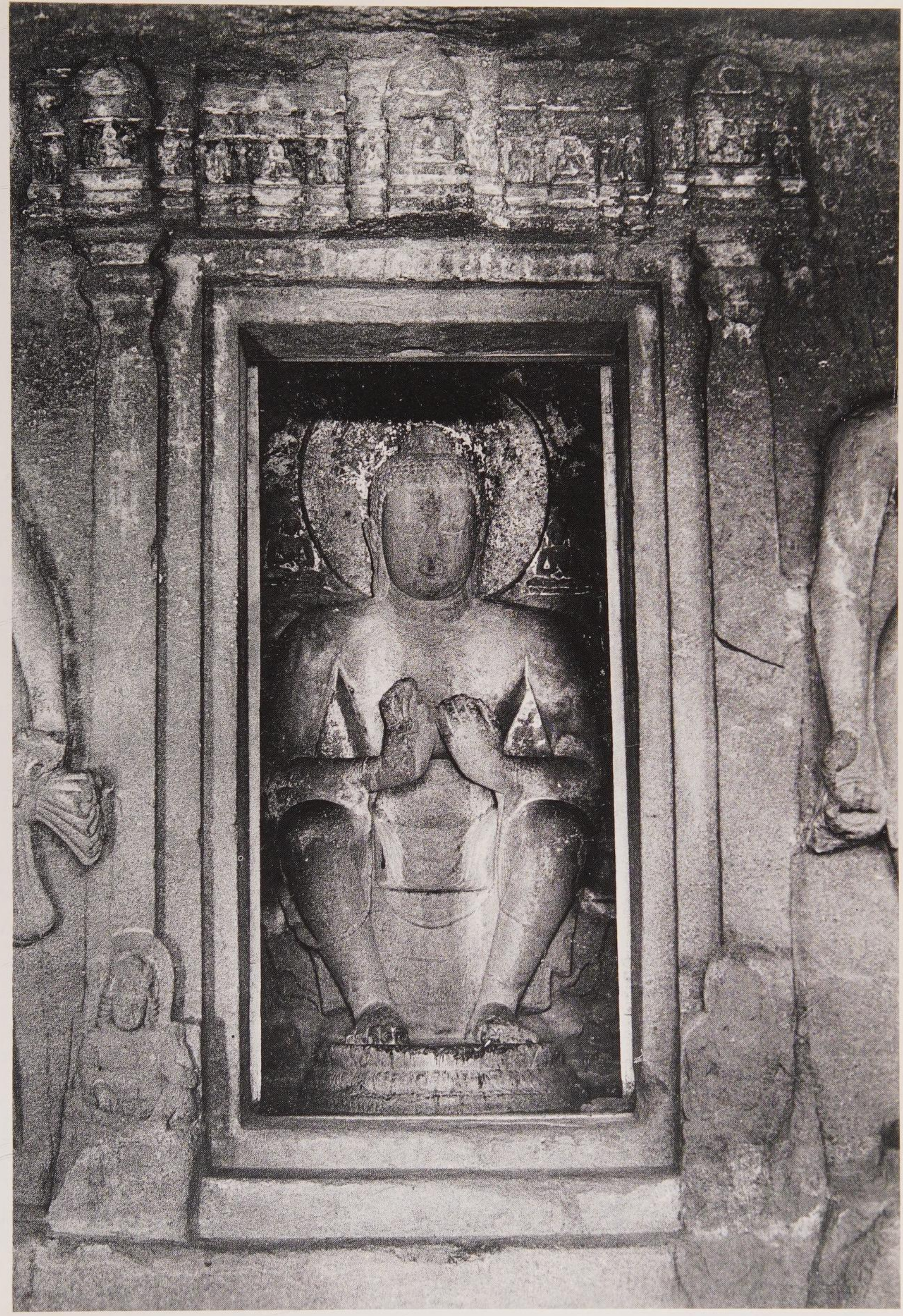


Cave 2 : Shrine wall exterior; as the viewer faces the Buddha, from left to right :
Virupaksha, guardian yaksha *or* dikmaharaja *(lord of direction), who accompanies the compassionate* bodhisattva *Avalokiteshvara, representing the* sangha; *The Buddha as the centre of the* Trisharana, *the Buddhist trinity, sitting in* pralambapadasana *and* dharmachakrapravartana mudra; *Maitreya, the Buddha to come, representing the* dharma *and Virudhaka, guardian* yaksha *or* dikmaharaja *(lord of direction)*



Cave 2 : Shrine wall exterior
Avalokiteshvara and Maitreya flanking the door to the shrine

Cave 2 : Shrine : >
The Master (Buddha) in the Trisharana *sitting in* pralambapadasana
with hands in dharmachakrapravartana mudra



Cave 2 : Vestibule, south panel
Avalokiteshvara with Jina
Amitabha and a stupa *on his*
headdress; the compassionate
bodhisattva *as* sangha. *He*
holds the banner of the
Master, the Buddha dvaja; *to*
his right is Virupaksha,
guardian yaksha *or*
dikmaharaja *(lord of*
direction); to his left, Kubera
sits at the door jamb

Cave 2 : Vestibule, north panel
Maitreya, the Buddha to come, as dharma *with Jina Amitabha in the crown of his matted hair; he holds the banner of the Master, the Buddha* dvaja; *a deerskin head is slung over his left shoulder; to his left (broken) is Virudhaka, guardian* yaksha *or* dikmaharaja *(lord of directions)*

The interspaces of the columns form voids, best observed from a position within the shrine, facing outward, because the voids are in close proximity with the shrine. The column brackets support a rectangular false plain beam, which frames the triptych of voids between the columns, allowing the light to enter, to illuminate the Buddha and to influence the play of light and shadow on the inner surfaces of the cave. Floor levels ascend in progression from *mandapa* to *antarala* to shrine, permitting the rays of the sun, which fall on the exterior *mandapa* floor, to be reflected deeply into the interior.

The Buddha in the shrine sits in *pralambapadasana* with hands in *dharmachakrapravartana mudra;* smaller than those in the other caves to match the smaller dimensions, he sits on a throne with two lions placed at the base. The goose's neck and head emerging from the mouth of the *makara* is again depicted. The carving of the Buddha is flat, only the front is indicated; little remains of the features on the face. The head is surrounded by a *prabhamandala,* still showing red paint. The hands are surprisingly beautiful, enclosing a void, and the outer outlines of the hands, the seat and the folds of the sleeves are forms well related to one another.

The Buddhas carved on the inner side walls of the shrine are without stalk and *nagas.* The rectangles are sometimes relieved by arches, but they are carved in a flat and rigid manner. This repetition of the Buddha theme, replacing the Dancing Tara of Cave 7, accentuates the declining aesthetic standards. The same can be said of the flying figures. Two large seated Buddhas *(kayas)* repeat the Cave 7 shrine scheme.

The walls of the *pradakshinapatha* are clustered with themes familiar at other earlier Buddhist sites. The Buddha sits most frequently in *padmasana,* sometimes in *pralambapadasana,* balanced on a large horizontal lotus whose pole-like stalk is being held aloft by two *nagas,* sometimes in a half turn. As in Cave 1 this represents

Mahapratiharya : *the Great Miracle of the Buddha at Shravasti, in which the Buddha proliferated himself.*

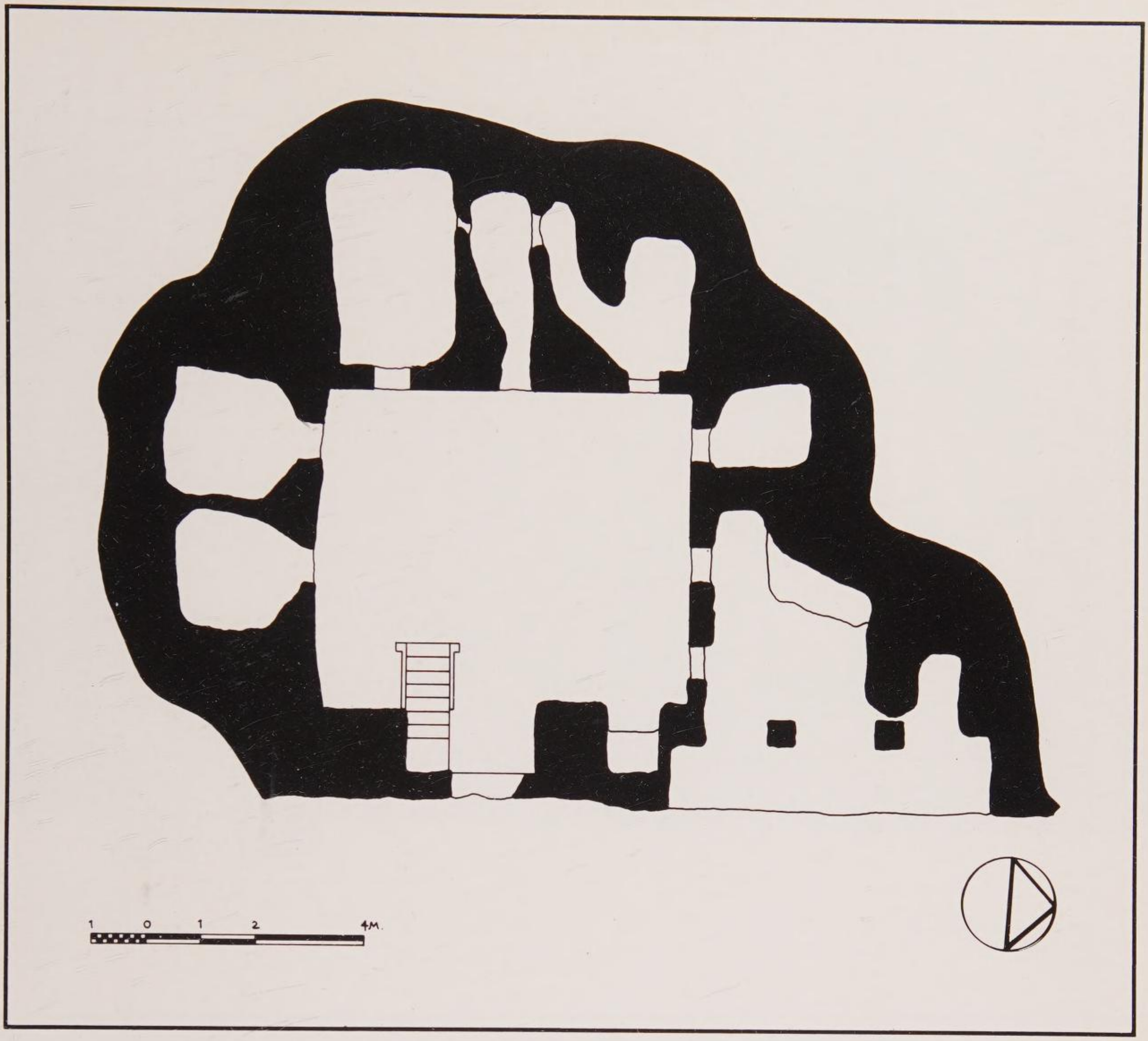
The theme is repeated obsessively with some variations in the *bodhisattvas,* flying cherubs and worshipers. All the groups are framed within a regtangular or square shallow niche. These rectangular aggregates are arranged in haphazard, disordered relationships, perhaps because patrons orderd them one at a time, without a coordinating architect.

Syncopation is effected by the unequal relationships of the frames in size, line and volume. A few frames eliminate the *nagas* and stalks. Because of the agitation suggested by the unequal placement vis-a-vis the flat and clean surfaces of the ceiling and the floor and by the changing effects of the illumination from the sun, these walls ironically appeal to the modern eye. The best panels maintain a sense of symmetry and are carved with some knowledge of proportion and subtle three-dimensional modelling.

Unlike Caves 7 and 6, there are no cells for meditation. The function must be sought as other than primarily monastic. Mahayana Buddhism prescribed worship of the Buddha and *bodhisattva* images with emphasis on the ritual of circumambulation. Even today a succession of pilgrims stop for water at the cistern; they are then drawn inwards to the side aisles, performing their *pradakshina*. Perhaps the cave also served as a classroom and meeting hall for distribution of food and clothing, as functions in such an active centre were probably not strictly delimited.

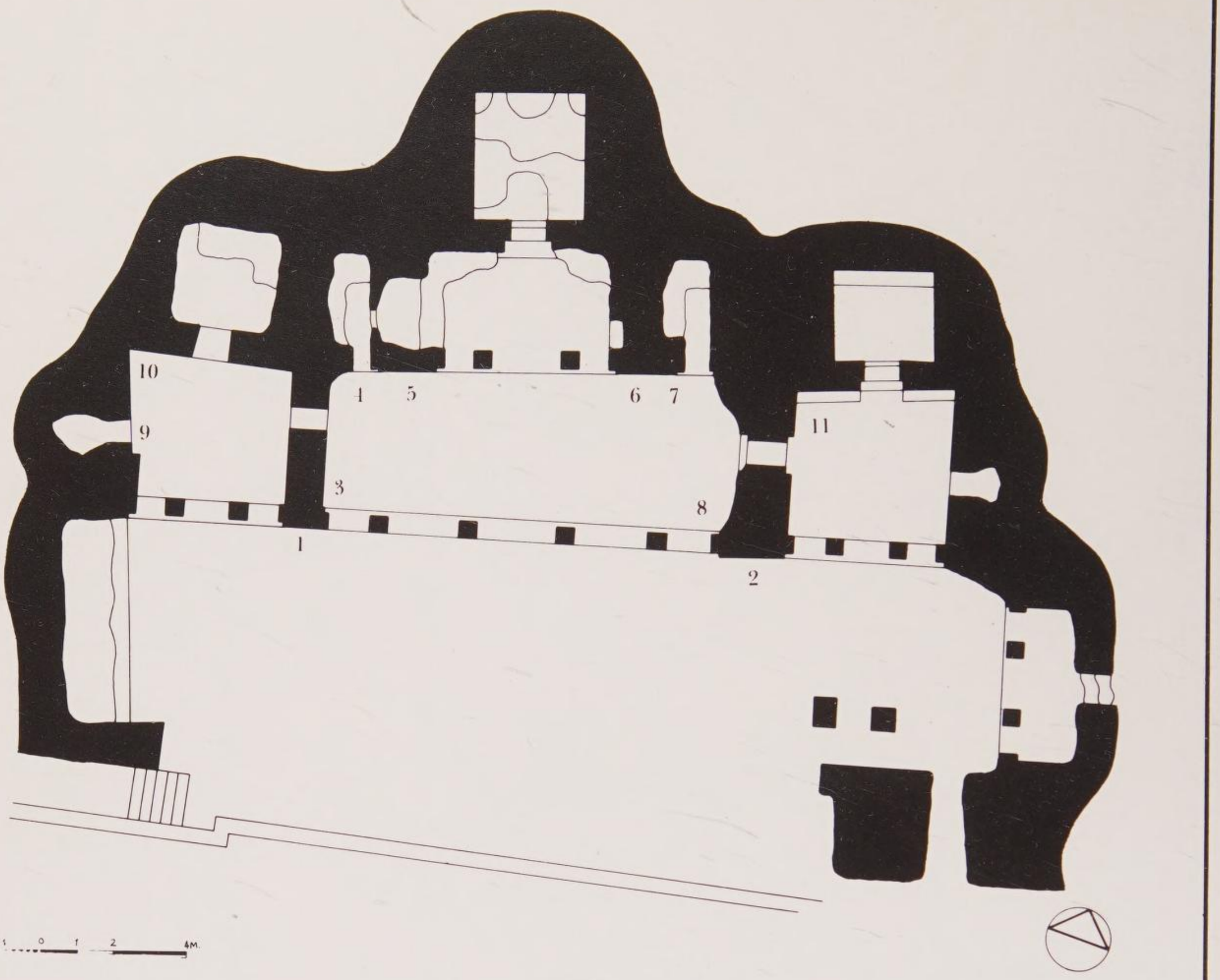
Cave 2 : North wall panel
Detail of Mahapratiharya *the Great Miracle of Shravasti: a* naga *holds the stalk of the lotus.*

Cave 2 : South wall panels
The Buddha is shown in various positions



Cave 8 :
The unfinished cave

Cave 2 : South wall panel
Mahapratiharya *: the Great Miracle at Shravasti in which the Buddha proliferated himself*



Cave 9 :

1. *Tara panel*
2. *Tara panel*
3. *Khadiravani-Tara*
4. *Arya-Tara*
5. *Avalokiteshvara*
6. *Avalokiteshvara*
7. *Tara*
8. *Locana*
9. *Buddha-Bimba*
10. *Avalokiteshvara*
11. *Muchulinda Buddha*

Cave 9 :
General view

Cave 8

Here is an abortive attempt to carve out a two storied sanctuary. Steps lead to a chamber off which there are six monk cells. A large lateral fissure cutting through the unfinished shrine and the rear portion of the excavation is the probable reason why the site was abandoned. There are a number of small and charming bas-reliefs to be observed.

The unfinished state of the work enables us, however, to see the process of excavation clearly. Working from the front inwards and the top downwards the extent of the sanctuary was roughly defined. Details and finer dressing of the stone came later. The contrast of the raw unfinished state with the imposed human geometry reveals the difficulty involved in forming the stone.

Here, as in most other caves, subsequent inhabitants have left their mark in the form of cooking places, holes for grinding and board games permanently etched onto the floor awaiting the players.

Cave 9

The Mahayana cave construction phase may span fifty years, or more than a hundred, if Cave 5 is taken into account. Differences in style and quality of execution of the various works are marked, and by the time that Cave 9, the last, was constructed, Tantric focus on the female was in full bloom. Her presence in the cave is ubiquitous; she pervades its landscape, where the ample attributes of her femininity overflow. She seems to have won the contest for dominance, and by now she was more than comfortably restored to her former position of ascendance in the pan-Indian mentality.

Like Cave 1, this cave was unfinished, with work abandoned at the level of the *shrine* and *antarala;* the rock was found to be unsuitable. The construction of the Aurangabad caves seems to have come to a dead halt, possibly due to the unrest which was the result of dynastic reorganization.

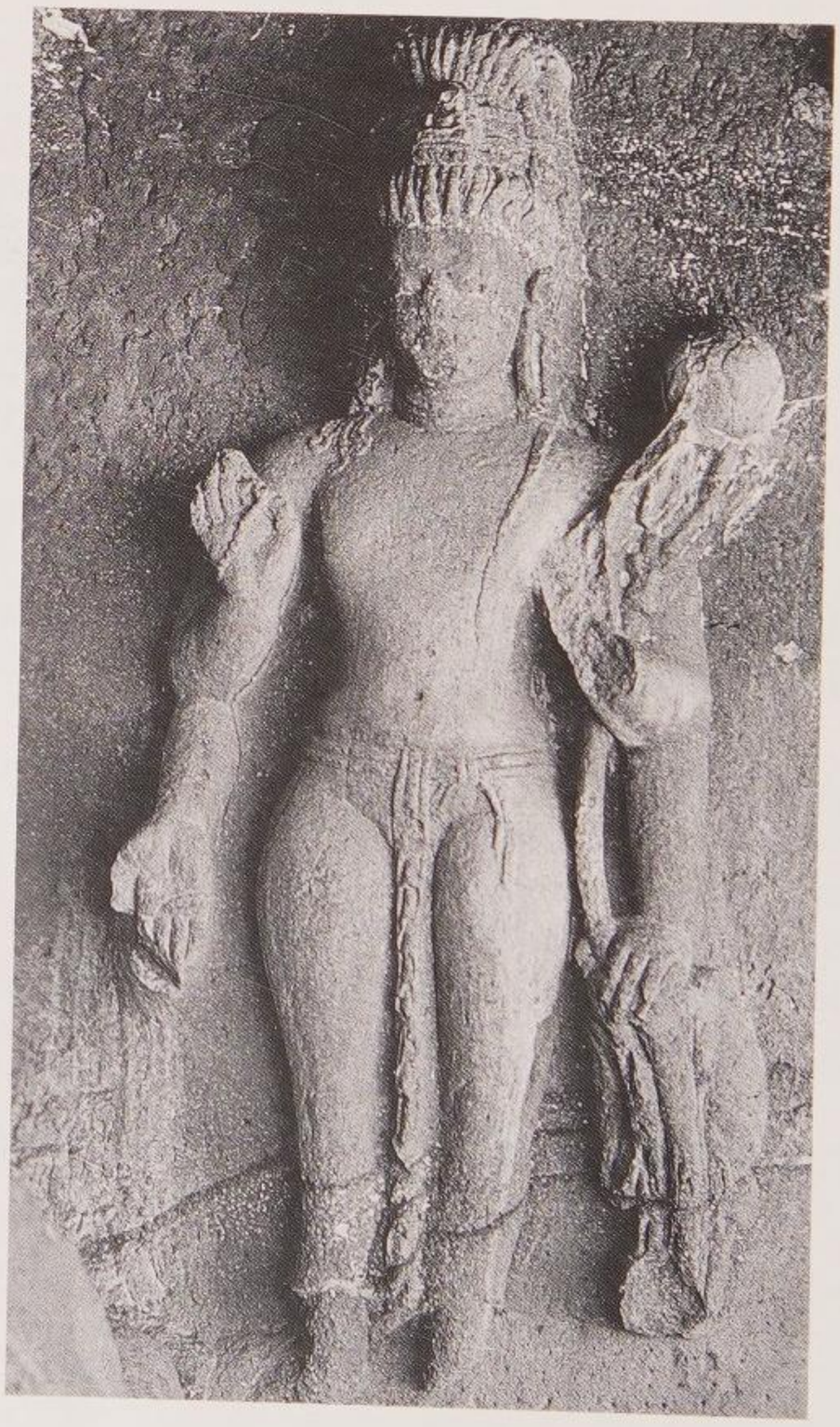
In style, the multiplicity of fragmented forms which had characterized the panel sculpture of earlier times now gives way to concentration on large, reductive and elemental volumes positioned on unadorned background space. The tendency towards form proliferation had already been slackened in Caves 7, 6 and 2, but in Cave 9 the new style begins confidently to assert itself. This transitional step was later to erupt into the dynamic, adamant and revolutionary development of a daringly creative style in the *Das Avatara* Cave, Ellora, a century later. But the beginnings may be observed here. Perfection of modelling of the small details of pillar and surface is replaced with large and more sweeping effects as individual, separate, large masses are juxtaposed against backgrounds almost empty of form. This represents a radical departure from the traditional panel in which a centred figure was surrounded with aggregates of smaller elements crowding the background.

Two groups of female *bodhishaktis* greet the devotee as though to entice entrance either into the side shrines or into the *mandapa.* Now the females have usurped prime positions. They control the universe of the temple on the porch as well as in the interior *mandapa,* where four *bodhishaktis* share the wall space with two *bodhisattvas.* The changing currents of thought and practice were influencing the choices of the artists.

On the porch wall on the viewer's left, in succession from his left to right are :

Sucimukha
Tara
Bhrikuti

Cave 9 :
Court (damaged)



Cave 9 : South end of damaged court; on the wall
Guarding an unfinished carving of Buddha's passing (Parinirvana):
Jatamukuta-Lokeshvara. The attribute in the missing left hand was presumably the Kamandalu; the figure has matted hair and has a tiny figure of the Dhyani Buddha Amitabha on top of the head. This is the only four-armed figure at the Aurangabad Caves.

On the wall on the viewer's right, in succession from his left to right are :

Ekajata
Tara
Bhrikuti

An interesting four-armed image guards the Buddha:

> *His right upper hand holds the rosary, and his right lower arm points to the earth* (varada mudra). *His left lower arm supports the lotus stalk and presumably he held a waterpot* (kamandalu) *in the broken hand. The tiny figure of Dhyani Buddha Amitabha is the emblem for his matted hair. He is :*
>
> *Jatamukuta-Lokeshvara*

This is the only multiple armed figure at Aurangabad Caves.

The interior *mandapa* has :

Khadiravani-Tara
Arya Tara
Avalokiteshvara

on the south and west walls

Locana
Tara
Avalokiteshvara

on the north and west walls. Although each of the six individual primary statues is a powerful and voluminous mass in its own right—and there are also some charming flying figures and cherubs—strict adherence to rectangular outline and the precisely finished and refined work which characterized and is the mark of Cave 7 is no longer evident here. The stone is only roughly hewn at the doorways, there is less concentration on deliniation of parts, less attention to finished surface detail, to rounding out the particulars, with the result that the forms take on an aspect of rough solidity. The style of the male *bodhisattvas* tends towards dissolution of form; they lack the grace and subtlety of those in Cave 7; both are mechanically executed exhibiting little individuality, which indicates their chronological distance from their brother *bodhisattvas* in Cave 7. But the female figures, as if from their newly acquired positions of power, show more careful workmanship; yet there is less grace, more solidity of mass, less delight in exquisite beauty of form in all its nuances or in provocative positions of the body than in the Cave 7 Taras and their attendants. There is more weight and breadth, more heaviness and simplicity,

Cave 9 : Wall of damaged court, south panel :
Tara in the centre with Sucimukha (damaged) and Bhrikuti to her right and left respectively

Cave 9 : Wall of the damaged court, north panel :
Tara in the centre with Ekajata and Bhrikuti to her right and left respectively

Cave 9 : Mandapa, *south portion* :
Buddha-Bimba seen through the door to the connecting (south) shrine, representing the core (dharma-dhatu) *of the* Tri-kaya *philosophy of the Buddhists; the lone female figure to his right is Khadiravani-Tara. The remaining two figures are Avalokitesvara (male) and Arya-Tara (female)*

< *Cave 9* : Mandapa, *south portion*
Arya-Tara

Cave 9 : Mandapa
The north portion with Avalokiteshvara, Tara and Locana
Cave 9 : Mandapa
Partial view, facing north

although there are still some views which reveal voluptuous stances. The final moment of the refinement of the classic age had passed. A new spirit of a more rough and hardy race of women and men seems to have emerged.

The vast court of Cave 9, the porch, probably had a low roof which is now effaced. The encounter with the sanctuaries on the left, centre and right immediately reveals a startling sequence of shifting views in continual states of transformation which become evident as the visitor changes positions. There is a new concentration on space. Through voids created by pillars (most are now restored), wall carvings of sculpture and the voids of the cells in the hall and of the main shrine become visible during the progression towards the rear (north) end of the court. Interconnected carved volumes and dark rectangular spaces seem to be in a constant state of flux when the viewer is in motion, or even when at rest. The sculptors were again reflecting the deep-rooted Indian concept about the world which is in continual transformation.

The arrangement of two square side shrines flanking a long narrow hall aligned along a single axis is unique. The extensive floor space focuses on the new concern with spatial freedom. The interior space has been enlarged, substituting void and light for the compactness of the earlier caves, perhaps in an attempt to move on to a higher and less particularized plane. Eleven spaces, formed by the eight pillars and the wall dividers leading to the sanctuaries are apprehended simultaneously in a rhythmic sequence of alternating voids and volumes.

The central sanctuary, the *mandapa,* with *bodhisattvas* aligned on the interior walls leads through two pillars (three voids) into a similar arrangement of side shrines flanking a less wide rectangular vestibule. The repetitive triple arrangement, diminishing in width as it approaches the internal shrine, is the geometrical understructure. Huge seated :

Jambhalas (or Pancikas) and half-worked nagas

are unfinished carvings on the facade of the shrine. As planned, the Buddha within was to form the pinnacle of a triangle with the Taras of the porch forming the other two angles.

It is not possible to concentrate on one figure at a time for long, as other voids and volumes in the vicinity intrude, leading one to another until the cave becomes an orchestration of forms which are perceptually united both sequentially and simultaneously. There are no frames to limit the relationships of volumes which seem to shift now towards one direction and again towards

another; for example, the chubby *vidyadharas* on the north doors of the *mandapa* can be observed to be either part of the lintel or at the same time to be accompanying the Tara. The abandonment of confining frames indicates a departure from the classic style.

The arrangement of a rhythmic sequence of volume (the sculpture) and void (the doorways) is especially conducive to successive viewing preceding a conceptual grasp of the totality. Much of the effect depends on the syncopated relationship of unequal weights of volumes set against the very stark background of flat, unadorned ceiling, floors and walls. The voluptuous accents of rounded forms contrasting with flat planes exhibit polarities of plastic expression. Earlier, for example in Cave 21, Ramesvara in Ellora, the fecund forms of female figures were accentuated by flowering vegetative design, but form proliferation has here been abandoned in the interest of accenting the human figure which now stands alone. In fact, this focus on the human figure as separate from animal and plant life is a reflection of the new emphasis on common man whose possibilities for salvation were being encouraged in Mahayana Buddhism. Everyman is important now, as opposed to the very elitist concepts of the earlier Buddhism and of the Hindu caste system.

To make this experience all the more intriguing, the east and west portals act as transitions into more distant areas. Partially hidden figures carved on the walls of the side shrines reveal themselves. Again they beckon, and the viewer is prompted to see what lies beyond, for example to examine the

> *Buddha-Bimba, which represents the core* dharma-dhatu
> *of the* Tri-kaya *philosophy*

who is visible through the south portal when standing in the *mandapa.*

When the narrow door and the steps are traversed, voids again alternate with panels. There are additional roughly hewn seated and standing *bodhisattvas,* but the workmanship has deteriorated, both of the panels and of the Buddhas sitting in the small shrines. Proportion, craft and quality are lost. Perhaps a catastrophe was about to occur, and indeed it may have occurred. The Buddha in the main shrine and the sleeping Buddha on the porch were never executed.

A reverse view from within the sanctuaries has the same effect, permitting perception of receding spaces, a photograper's delight, since the sculptures in the distant wall are framed by the rectangular door which is nearer. But no photograph can do this spatial relationship justice. It can only serve as a tantalizing invitation to visit the caves.

The east shrine is triple doored and empty but for two :

Muchulinda Buddhas

whose concave cobra hoods are startling because of their large size and because concave forms are rarely encountered in Indian sculpture. A bold and intuitive artist was at work exhibiting a premonition about the intuitions of the later Rashtrakuta sculptors. Another rather stunted Buddha sits in *pralambapadasana* in the central shrine here, but there is little interest.

The Brahmanical Cave

A syncretist movement is reflected in a small excavation directly to the south of Cave 6. We know from five caves at Ellora in which the seven mothers *(sapta matrika)* are prominently displayed that they had already achieved popularity with the Hindus in this area. Someone seems to have made the attempt at combining the two religions by dedicating a single cave to Brahmanism and Buddhism.

On the west wall the standing *sapta matrika* group from east to west represents :

Virabhadra, a form of Shiva
Brahmi
Maheshvari
Kaumari
Vaishnavi
Varahi
Indrani

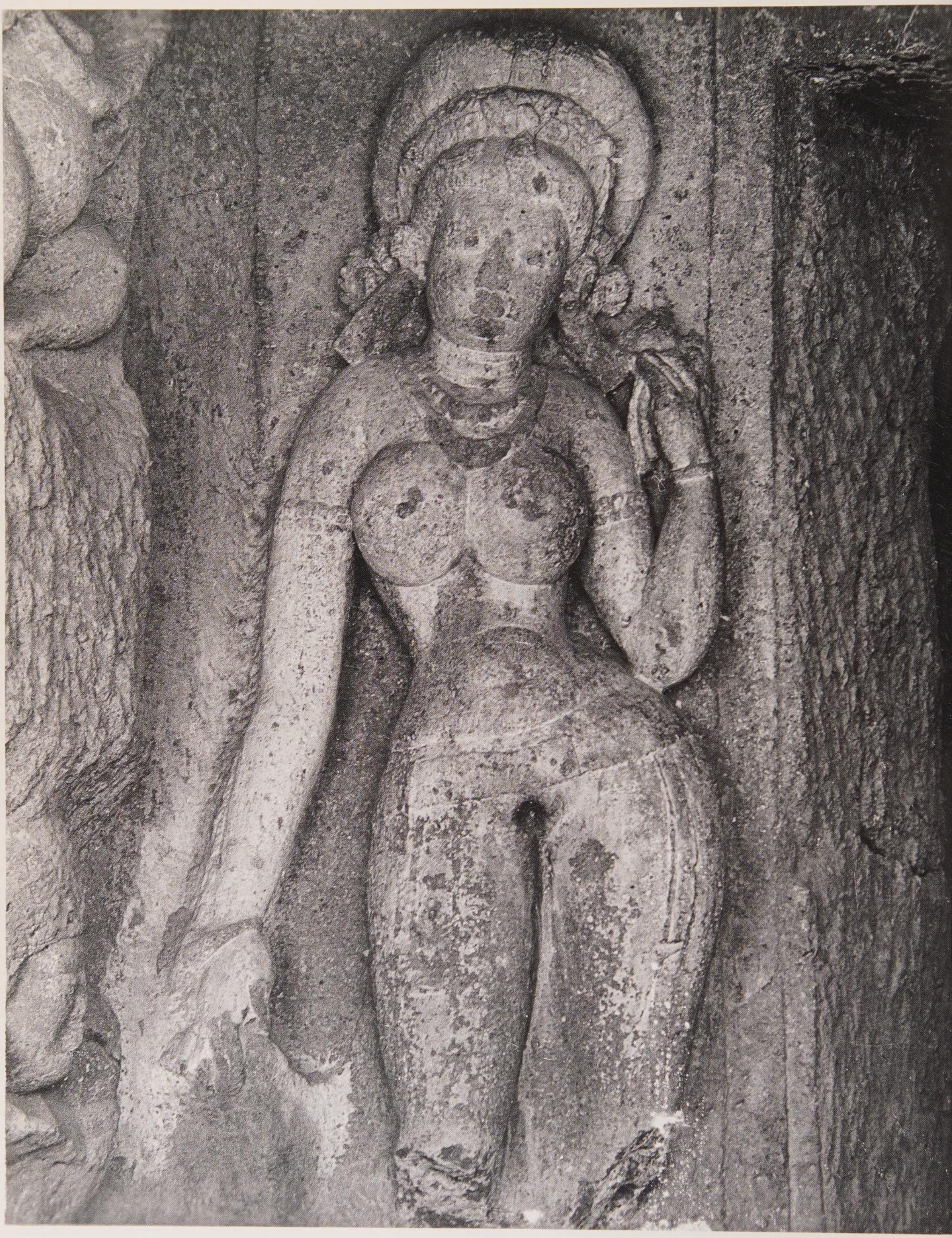
Although it is usual to have all of the seven mothers placed in a row, here

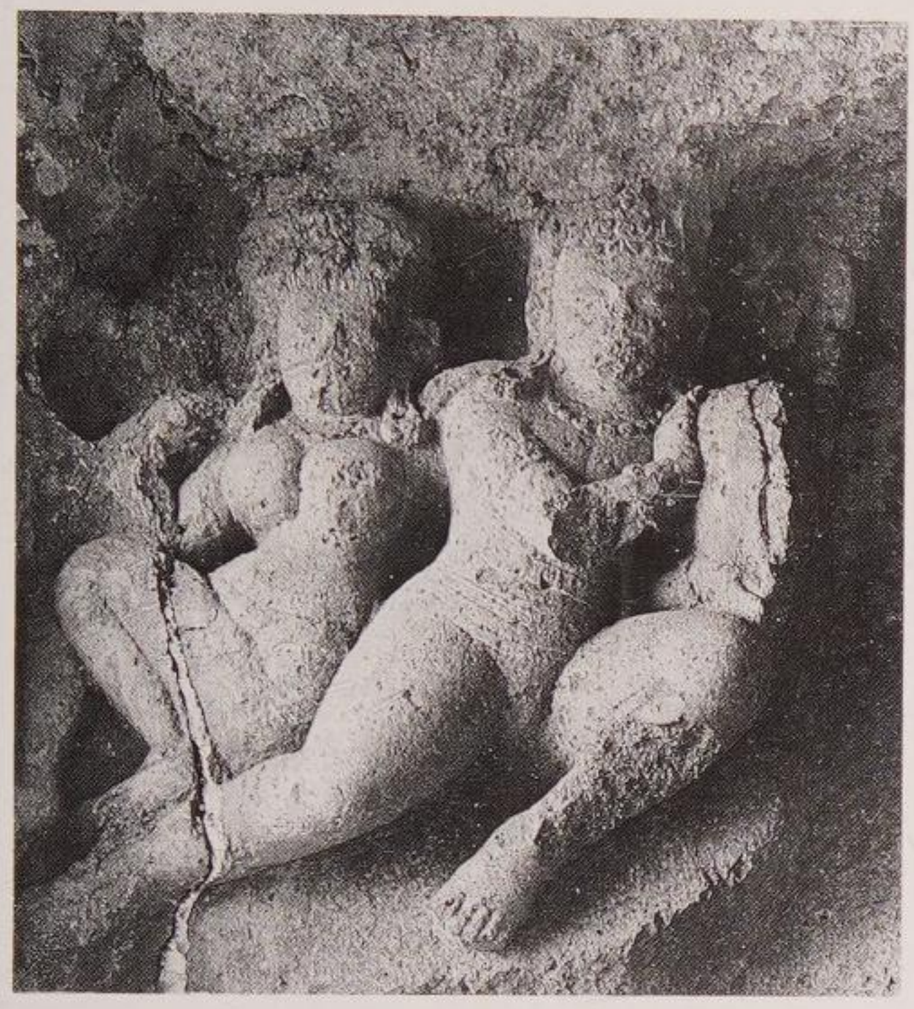
Chamunda and
Ganesa

are continued on the west wall. The order is conventional, but the standing *matrikas* are seen only at one other site, in the east wing shrine at Elephanta. On Ganesa's left :

Durga stands with her right foot on the lion holding trisula, *upright sword* (kadgha), *bell* (ghanta) *and vessel* (kalasa)

Cave 9 : South shrine, a view through the south door of the mandapa*: Buddha-Bimba, representing the core* (dharma-dhatu) *of the* Tri-kaya *philosophy of the Buddhists*





Cave 9 : South shrine :
Buddha-Bimba and Avalokiteshvara

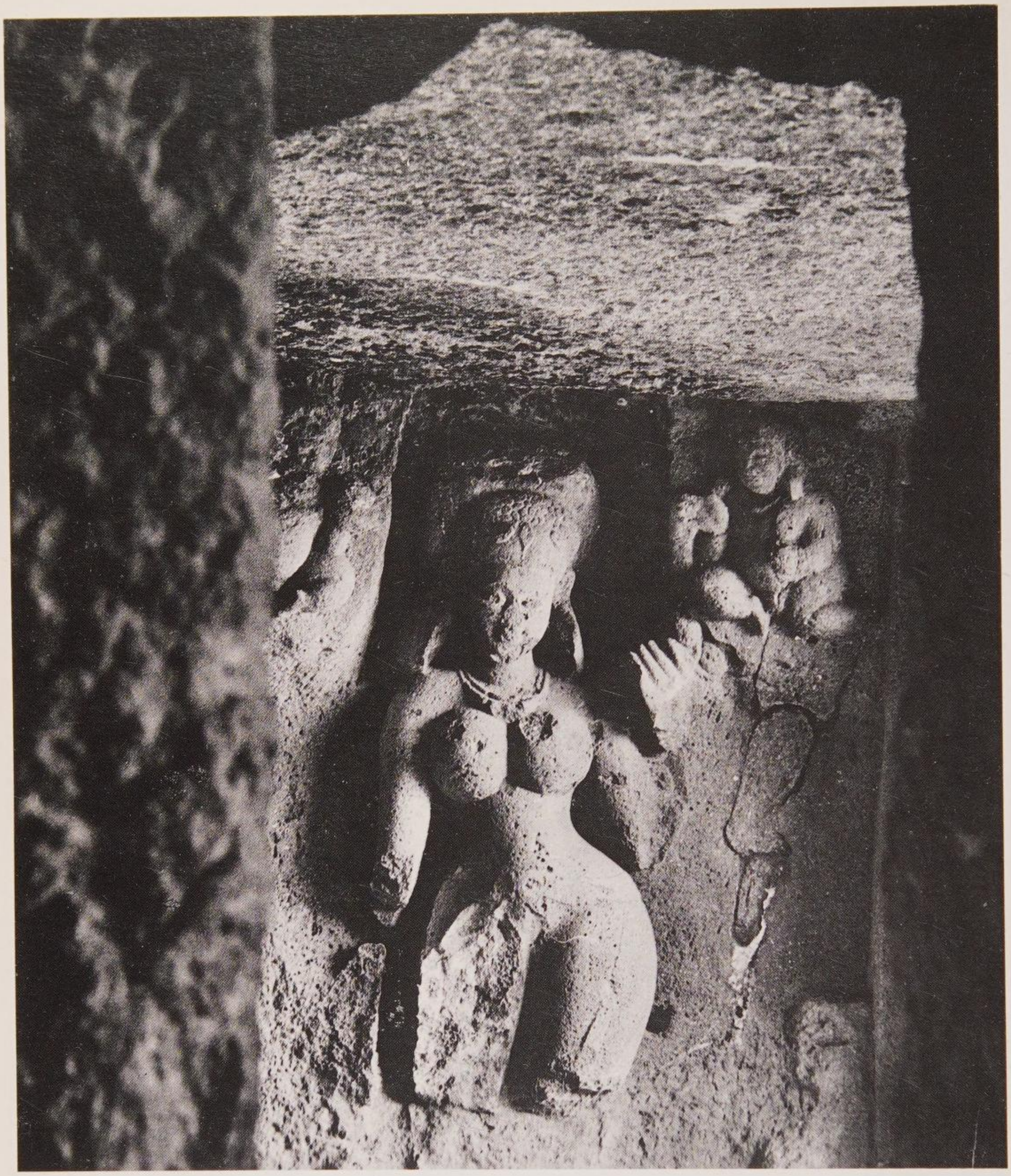
Cave 9 : Mandapa, *south wall panel*
Khadiravani-Tara panel, flying figures

Cave 9 : Mandapa, *south wall panel*
Khadiravani-Tara panel, worshiper

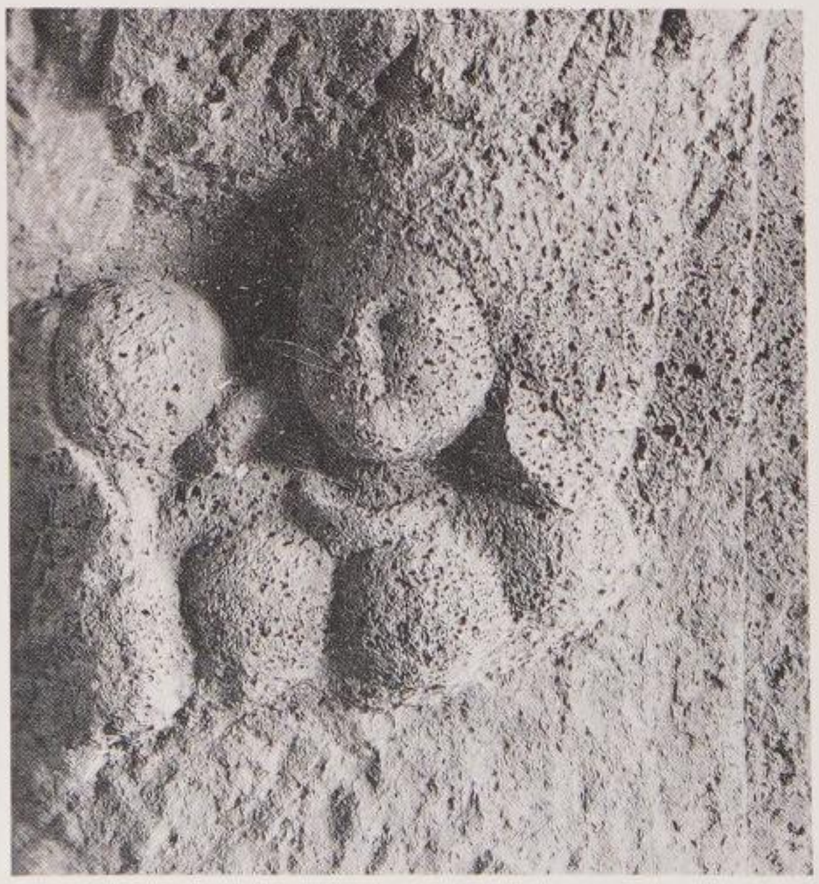
< *Cave 9 :* Mandapa, *south portion,*
Arya Tara

Cave 9 : Mandapa, *north portion*
Tara

< *Cave 9 :* Mandapa, *north portion*
Avalokiteshvara : profile of head

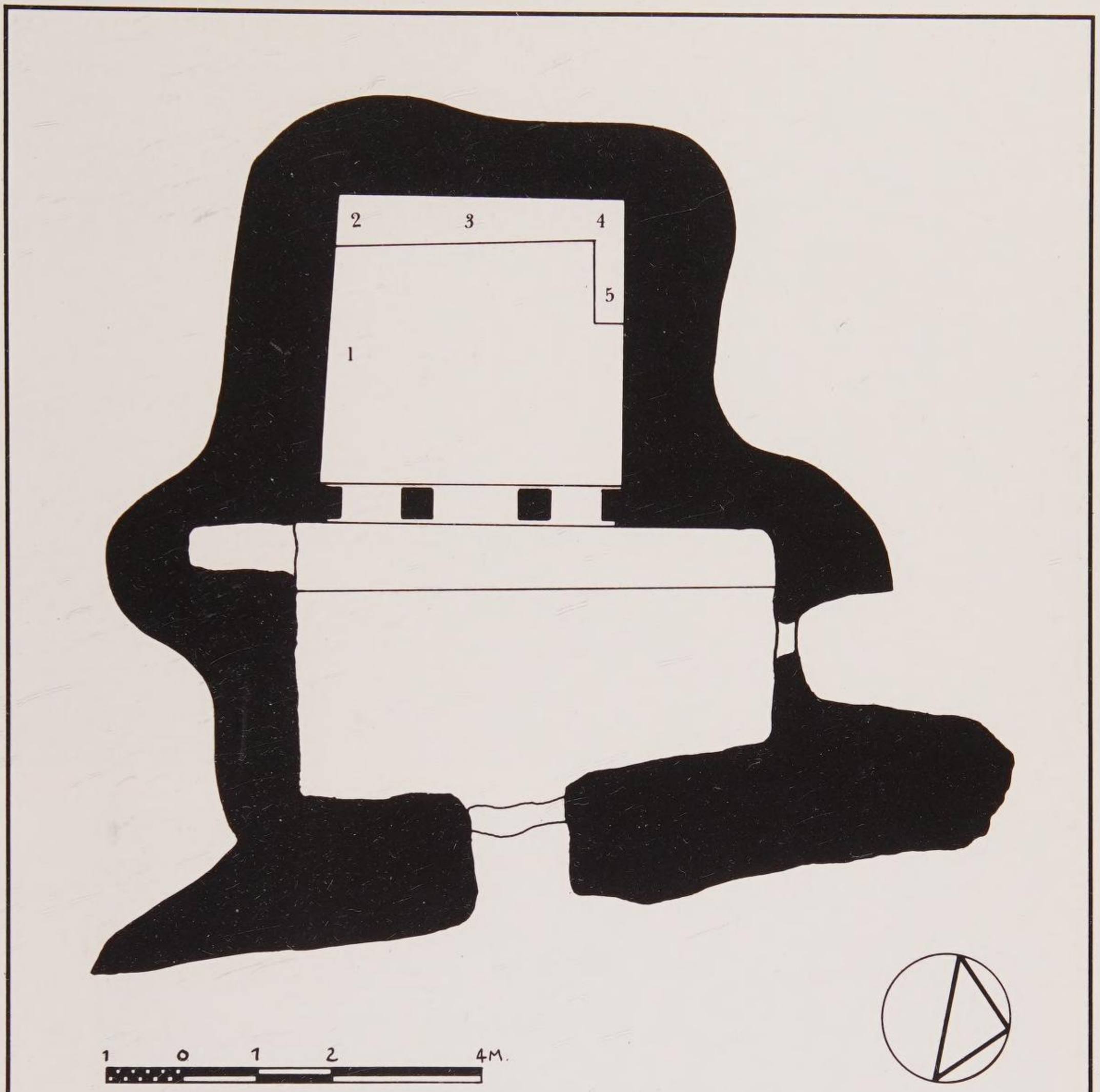


Cave 9 : Mandapa,
north portion
Locana *panel*



Cave 9 : Mandapa,
north portion
Cherubic worshipers

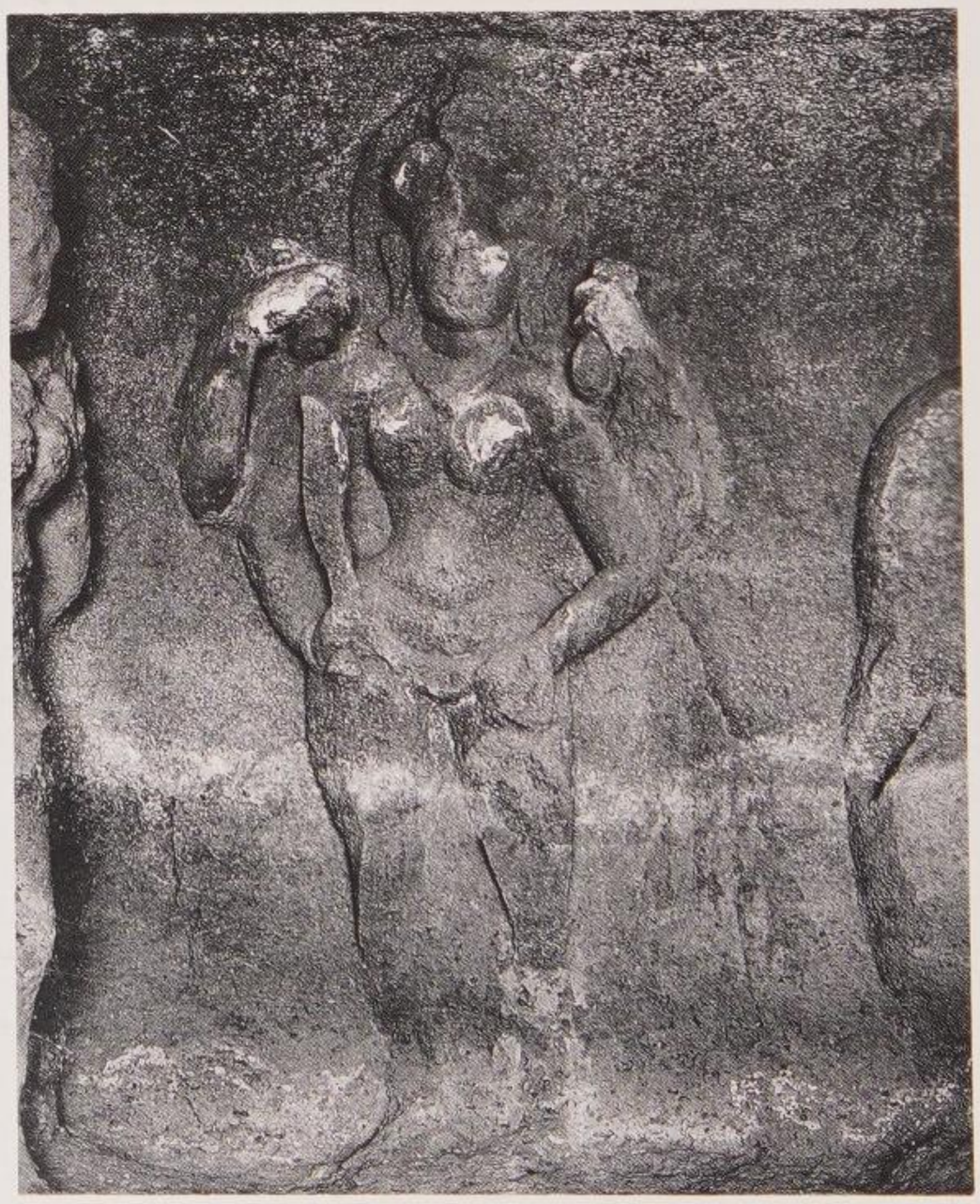
Cave 9 : North shrine
Muchulinda Buddha



Brahmanical Cave

1. Sapta matrikas
2. *Chamunda*
3. *Ganesa*
4. *Durga*
5. *Buddha*

a

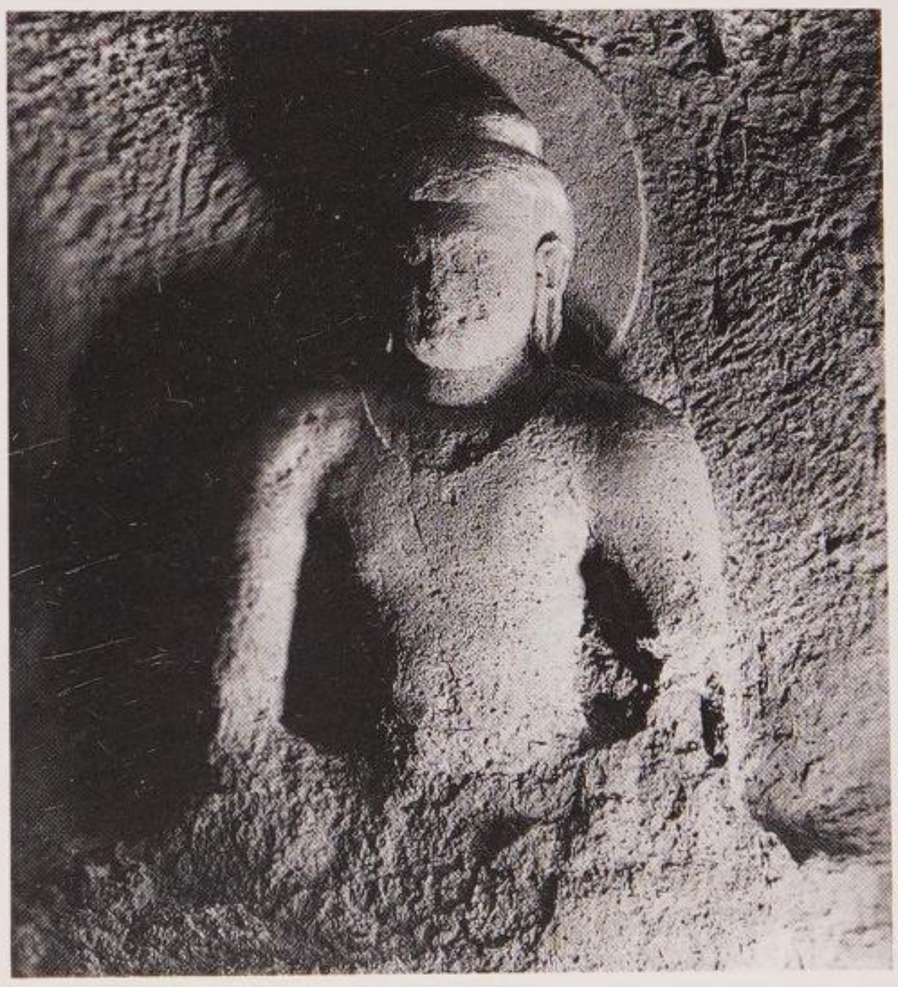


b

a *Brahmanical Cave : south wall and west wall*
Seven mothers (sapta matrika); *from the viewer's left to right : Virabhadra, a form of Shiva; Brahmi, Maheshvari, Kumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi. Indrani on the south wall. Chamunda and Ganesa on the west wall. (Identification by Ramesh Gupte)*

b *Brahmanical Cave : West wall*
Chamunda

Brahmanical Cave : West wall and north wall
Ganesa, Durga and Buddhas



Brahmanical cave : North wall :
Buddha

< *Brahmanical cave : West wall*
Durga stands with her right foot on the lion; she holds the trisula; *upright sword* (kadgha); *bell* (ghanta) *and vessel* (kalasa) *(Identification by Ramesh Gupte)*

Brahmanical cave : West wall
Ganesa and Durga

Glossary

abhaya mudra — hand position denoting protection

abhishekha — water purification of the icon; consecration

acharya — teacher or spiritual guide

advaya — the state of non-duality

anda — egg; hemispherical dome of the *stupa*

antarala — rectangular vestibule leading to the sanctum-cella in the temple

apsaras — celestial maidens

arama — rain retreat of monks near a town; constructed of mud, brick and thatch.

arhat — one who seeks salvation

arhatship — the spiritual quest

ashramas — four phases of life: child as student, youth for maintenance of family, middle age for spiritual quest and old age for the life of a recluse

atman — the Absolute, the centre, the immeasurable and immutable reality

avasa — rain retreat in the countryside; constructed of mud, brick and thatch

avatar — the god manifested in physical form

Bhagavadgita — ancient Hindu devotional poem; c. 2nd cent. B.C.

bhakti — intimate devotion to an incarnated deity

bija mantra — mystical formula of invocation or incantation reduced to its essence (or seed)

bodhicitta notsrfet (Tibetan) — the supreme state of Being in the Buddhist ideology symbolized by placing the *vajra* in the lotus

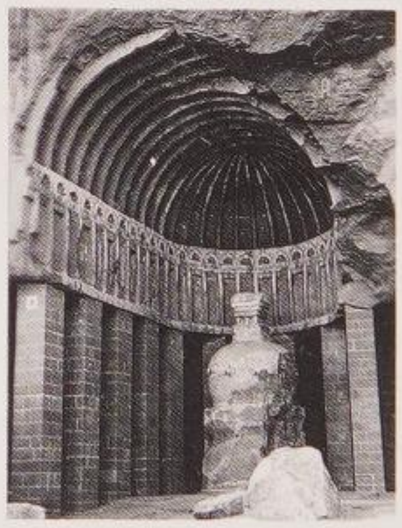
bodhisattva — compassionate superbeing who chooses to give up *nirvana,* to stay in the round of rebirths in order to help suffering humanity to overcome its condition; a potential Buddha.

bodhi tree — tree under which the Buddha meditated and achieved enlightenment at Gaya.

Buddha-dvaja — banner of the master

Buddha shakti — *bodhishakti;* female compassionate being.

chaitya (hall) — a structure meant for worship of the *stupa,* apsidal in form, with serialized columns forming nave and aisles, having a vaulted roof; or the sculpture motif resembling the outer facade of the vault



chakra — a circle or disc

chowri bearer — fan bearer; an attendant to an important personage or god

Deer Park in Sarnath — where the Buddha preached his first sermon concerning the doctrine of the law for the good of the many

dharma — the law; moral doctrine taught by the Buddha

dharmachakrapravartana mudra — hand gesture of the Buddha, denoting the turning of the wheel of the law

dharini — concept reduced to a single seed syllable

dhatu — relics of seeds of the Buddha and other spiritual leaders

dhyana — meditation

dhyana mudra — hand position of the Buddha; hands rest upon his lap, placed one above the other, palms facing upwards

Dhyani Buddhas — Bodhisattvas of the first order out of the Buddha

dikmaharaja — lord of directions

dukha — suffering or sorrow; Buddha's definiton of the human condition

gana — dwarf-like playful creature

gandharvas — a sculpture motif; male flying figures

garbha — literally, womb; applied here to the egg shaped *stupa*

guha — dwelling for monks constructed either of mud, brick or carved in the living rock

guru — teacher, learned man

harmika — pavilion, railed balcony surmounting the dome of the *stupa*

hatha yoga — physical discipline leading towards liberation

Hinayana — term meaning the "lesser vehicle", refers to Theravada Buddhism

Jataka tale — story concerning the former lives of the Buddha

kamandalu — water pot

karma — fate; power to influence the future of an individual, either for good or bad; all phenomena result from a cause, and action is followed by its effect

karuna — compassion

kaya — phase; see *tri-kaya*

kinnaras — flying figures; semi-divine musicians

kriya — ritual

kundalini — the female principle within the self; energy

kirti-mukha — a sculpture motif; "face of glory" showing a flat lion's visage; pre-Buddhist, it usually is considered to be a protective device to ward off evil influences; auspicious sign

Madhyamika — proto-Mahayana sect of Buddhism

Magadhi — a version of Prakrit, the language of the people by means of which the Buddha taught

Mahamudra — the ground of existence; source out of which all emanates and to which all returns; divine mother;

Mahasukha — the body of the disciple is charged with the power of that which he has meditated upon

Mahapratiharya great miracle of the Buddha at Shravasti

Mahapurusa superman, applied to Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha

Mahasanghikas dissidents expelled from the Vaishali Council in the 4th century B.C.; an early expression of the Madhyamika tenets

mahavihara monastic university

Mahayana "Greater Vehicle", whose major philosophical principles were expounded by Nagarjuna; the later aspects of Buddhism

makara torana a sculpture motif, a

mythical water creature; a composite animal, part elephant, pig, lion, peacock and fish

M : the *Pancha-tattva* ceremony includes :

matsya fish

mudra parched grain

mamsa flesh

madya wine

maithuna union of male and female; couples symbolizing fertility originating in pre-Buddhist times

mandala a diagram, square or circular, symbol of the universe, used as a vehicle for meditation and ritual

mandapa the hall of a temple or shrine

mantra concept reduced to a phrase to be chanted during ritual

maya the relationship between the Absolute and the devotee; often used as a synonym for illusion

mudra ritual gesture of the hands of deities signifying various actions or powers

mukuta the headdress of the god and the *bodhisattva;* some carry emblems for identification

mula-stambha central world pillar; axis mundi

nagas — serpent community, inhabiting a watery kingdom in the *patala* region underneath the earth; they have great influence and are worshiped in their own right; they were absorbed into Buddhism as supporters and protectors

nagaraja — serpent king

nirvana — enlightenment; a transcendent state of being which the Buddha did not define verbally

padma — lotus; an ecumenical symbol of the creative forces of nature; associated with the womb, growth, development, stillness, universality, but above all, life forces; as seat or pedestal it is functionally related to the Buddha

padmasana — *yoga* posture of legs; symbol for the idea of disciplining the body and conquering the mind and senses to bring focus upon inwardness of being, meditation and wisdom

Pancha-tattva — a ritual involving five procedures; the consumption of certain food and drink after which physical union between male and female takes place

parinirvana — Buddha's leaving the world at Kusingara; his physical death

patala-loka — underground watery kingdom of the serpents

pattimokkha — at first a code for monks, later a bi-monthly confessional meeting with penances for transgression of sins

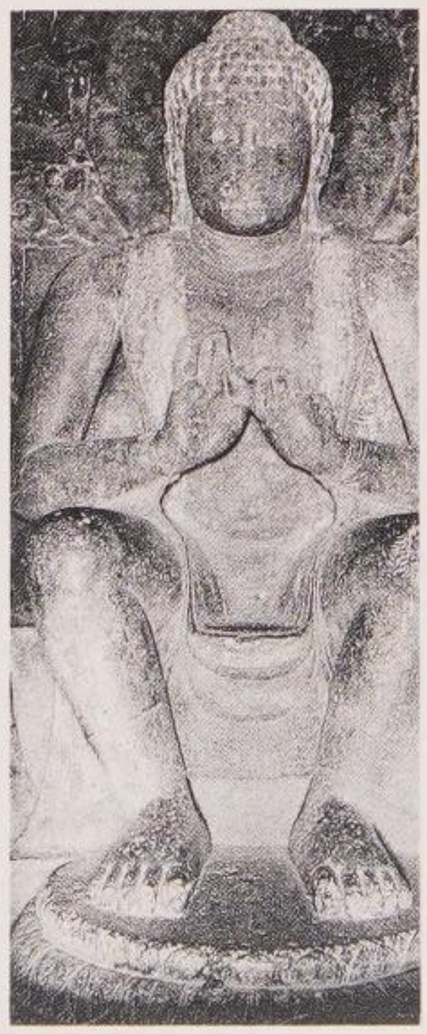
prabhamandala — the aureole, a large circular flat halo, extending from the shoulders to above the head

pradakshinapatha — the circumambulatory pathway around the shrine; the devotee moves clockwise with his right shoulder to the Buddha

prajna — awareness, perfect knowledge of non-duality, wisdom

prajnaparamita — perfection of wisdom; transcendental wisdom

pralambapadasana — seated position of the Buddha in which his thighs are apart and his feet rest on the pedestal; "European style"



pratityasamutpada — interdependent origination

purnaghata — a sculpture motif; vase of plenty

sadhana — ritual procedures for reaching the Mahasukha

sakyasimha — The Buddha is known as the "lion of the Sakyas", the strength of the law is compared to the strength of a lion

shalabhanjika — a female who touches a tree to make it grow; a sculpture motif; a fertility symbol

samsara — round of rebirths

sangha — the monks' community; the instrument to fulfil the law

sapta matrikas — seven mothers who are worshiped as deities in a group

sardula — a sculpture motif; a man riding on a mythical beast which has the tail and claw of a lion, a thick mane and upright horns

shakti — female energy, power

siddha — a holy man with supra-normal powers, often a magician

simhasana — lion throne

sptasurabhuta — concept of dance and music based on seven notes

stupa — originally a tumulus for burial, adapted for Buddhism to symbolise the concept of Buddhahood, *nirvana*. Relics of the Buddha, kept in precious boxes of decreasing sizes, were placed within it; the inner core probably held a wooden pole to symbolise the world pillar, connecting the various planes of temporal and heavenly realms

sunyata — the void which is full; quintessential concept of Mahayana Buddhism

sutra — discourses of the Buddha

tala — a single horizontal storey in the roof of South Indian temples

tantra — a later development in Buddhism focusing on female and male polarity and their relative dependence; a body of literature

tantrikas — those who adhere to *tantric* practices

Tatagatha — Buddha; Mahapurusa, being; a guide or teacher with miraculous powers, who had lived through infinite previous births as a *bodhisattva* predestined to become enlightened and achieve *nirvana*

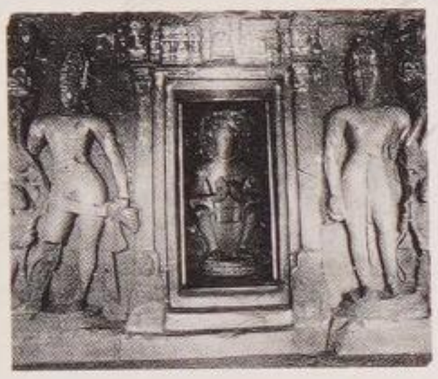
Theravadis — monks of the orthodox school

torana — gates constructed with upright shafts bearing cross bars

tri-kaya

system of Buddhism; the Vajrayana order in which the phenomenon of the Universe is explained in terms of three progressively overlapping phases or *Kayas,* viz., *Nirmana-Kaya* or materialistic phase, *Dharma-Kaya* or spiritual phase, and *Sambhoga-Kaya* or transcendental phase

trisharana



three jewels interacting to form a trinity of Buddhism; the Buddha, wisdom; *dharma,* the law; and the *sangha,* the pure community

upanishads — a body of philosophical-poetic literature primarily concerned with the relationship of the individual with the Absolute (*c.* 700-600 B.C.)

uposatha — a Buddhist ceremony dedicated to the maintenance of discipline in regard to the *vinaya,* taking place in a common meeting hall

upaya — compassion

vajra — diamond sceptre or thunderbolt, symbolizing a state of being where there are no longer distinctions between male and female. The diamond, of adamantine hardness, is metaphor for the body of the devotee after his achievement of Buddhahood

varada mudra — a hand gesture in which the hand is stretched downwards denoting charity or gift of boons

Vedas — earliest Brahmanical texts

vidyadharas — flying figures

viharas — Buddhist monasteries with accommodation for monks living in communities

vikalpa — false thought constructions

vinaya — the code of rules by which the monks lived and worshiped

vyakhyana mudra — in Buddhist texts interchangeable with *dharmachakrapravartana mudra*

yakshas and yakshis — fertility gods and goddesses respectively; objects of cult worship

yoga — physical or philosophical discipline aimed at the achievement of liberation

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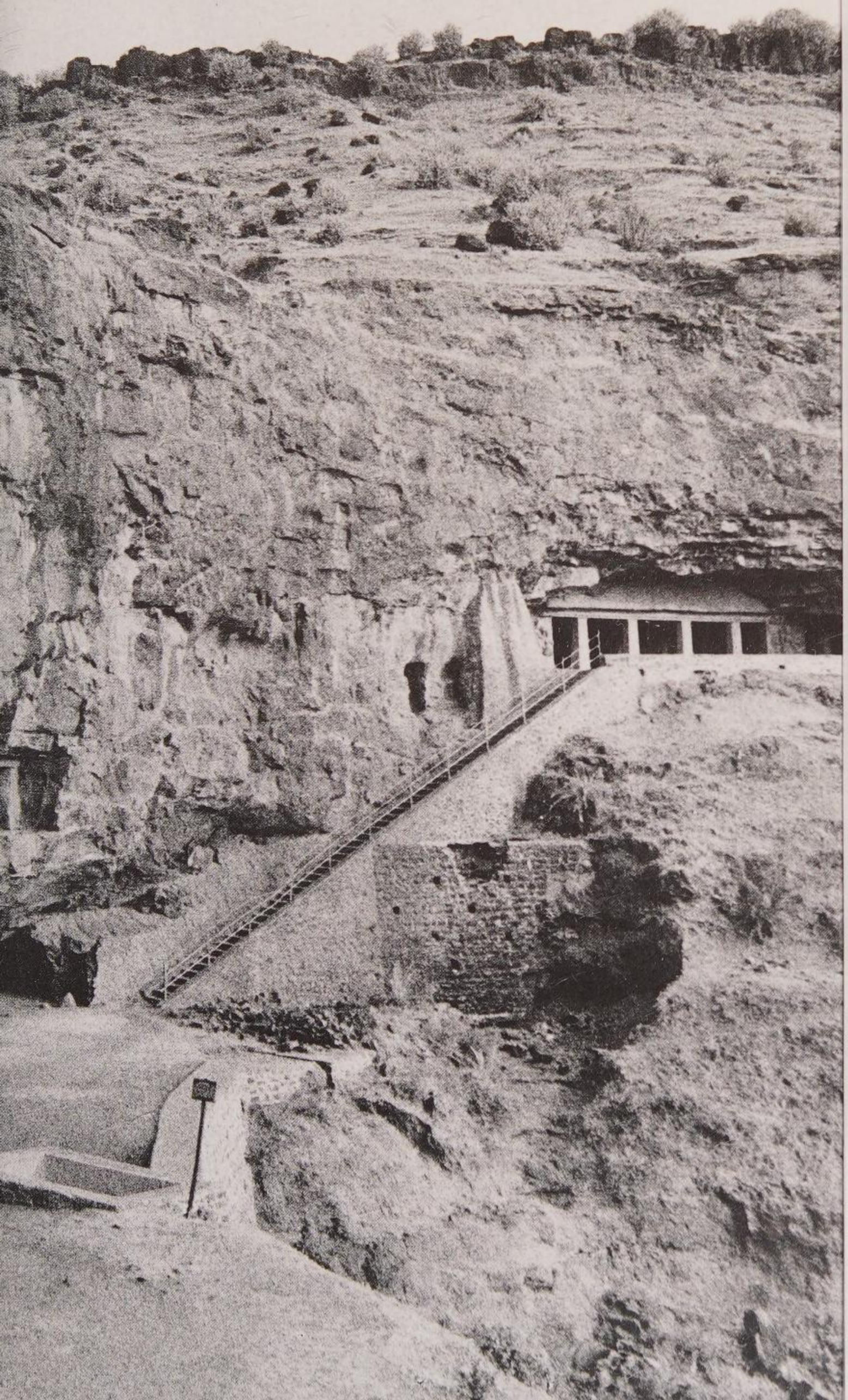

Carmel Berkson is a sculptor and photographer. During the past fifteen years she has travelled extensively in India for the purpose of studying and documenting Indian temple art. Her photographs are in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and she is the co-author of *Elephanta, the Cave of Shiva.* Ms. Berkson lives in Bombay and Ellora. Her forthcoming book is entitled *Elura, Concept and Style. Mulk Raj Anand,* writer, art-historian, philosopher and social thinker captures the spirit of the Buddhism of this period in an introductory poem. *Dipak C. Bhattacharyya,* Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts at Punjab University in Chandigarh is the author of *Tantric Buddhist Iconographic Sources.* He contributes authoritative iconographical identifications.